DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 362 919 CS 508 353

TITLE	Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (76th, Kansas City, Missouri, August 11-14, 1993). Part VII: Politics and Mass Media.
INSTITUTION	Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication.
PUB DATE	Aug 93
NOTE	465p.; For other sections of these proceedings, see CS 508 347-362. For 1992 proceedings, see ED 349 608-623.
PUB TYPE	Collected Works - Conference Proceedings (021)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC19 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Audience Participation; *Audience Response; Debate; *Mass Media Role; Media Research; *News Reporting; Political Campaigns; Political Candidates; Political Influences; *Political Issues; Presidential Campaigns (United States); Television
IDENTIFIERS	Congress; Newsmagazines; *Presidential Primaries; Talk Shows

ABSTRACT

The Politics and Mass Media section of this collection of conference presentations contains the following 13 papers: "The 1992 Presidential Debates: A Cognigraphic View" (Richard F. Carter and Keith R. Stamm); "Moving to the Front of the Bus?: Network Coverage of the Invisible Primaries during the 1988 and 1992 Elections" (Thomas J. Johnson and Joe Foote); "Information Presentation and Issue Salience: Their Relationships with Voter Decision-Making Strategies" (David Domke and Dhavan Shah); "Print Media Use and Perceived Credibility among Senior Congressional Staff" (James R. Edwards, Jr.); "The 'Bimbo Primaries': A Comparison of How the Major Television Networks Covered Charges of Womanizing against Bill Clinton and Gary Hart" (Jeanne Norton Rollberg and others); "Newsmagazine Visuals and the 1992 Presidential Election" (Sandra E. Moriarty and Mark N. Popovich); "Self-Efficacy Class, Race, and Call-in Political Television Show Use" (John E. Newhagen); "Talk Show Politics: The Match That Rekindles American Democracy?" (Edward Horowitz); "The Effect of 'Horse Race' Reporting in Increasing Voters' Issue Knowledge" (Xinshu Zhao and Glen L. Bleske); "Is It a Wall? A Tree? A Rope? Or an Elephant?--Television News and Ads as Sources of Issue Information" (Xinshu Zhao and others); "Negative Political Advertisements: Effects of Position, Performance and Personal Attacks" (Megan Mills and others); "Does the Audience Learn More about Images Than Issues from Televised Debates? Effects of the First 1992 Presidential Debate" (Jian-Hua Zhu and others); and "Media Priming in the 1992 Election Campaign: The Effects of Newspaper Stories on Evaluations of President Bush" (Lars Willnat). (NH)

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ED 362 919

PROCEEDINGS OF THE ANNUAL MEETING OF THE ASSOCIATION FOR EDUCATION IN JOURNALISM AND MASS COMMUNICATION (76TH, KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI, AUGUST 11-14, 1993). PARTVII: POLITICS AND MASS MEDIA.

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The 1992 Presidential Debates: A Cognigraphic View

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The 1992 Presidential Debates:
A Cognigraphic View

Who won the 1992 presidential debates? George Bush? William Clinton? Ross Perot? In what sense could these debates be said to have been won? Such questions are not easily answered. The three 1992 presidential debates presented a thicket of conditions with many potential effects. Further, they were embedded in an election campaign of even greater length and breadth. Assessing their effects is no easy matter. Four avenues suggest themselves:

* As usual, we could rely on analyses from multiple observers taking various perspectives. These might provide a consensus view of at least the most obvious of the debates' significance.

* Also as usual, we could wait on future events and on reinterpretations consequent to those events for a fuller assessment of the debates' significance. This too would be biased toward the most obvious (i.e., persisting) indications of significance.

* We could arrange to get an inside-the-debates look at moment-to-moment reactions to them, experimentally exposing nonviewers to them, such as by using the "signaled stopping" research technique (Carter et al, 1974; Hawkins et al, 1991). This approach has the virtue of getting closer to the "when" of effects. Less obvious and less lasting effects are also not so likely to be missed.

* We could arrange, via "before" and "after" surveys, to get a reading from viewer and nonviewer responses to the debates. This concern for the "what" of effects is limited by what we arrange to look for. What kinds of effects do we expect such debates to have? Can

our methods help us find such effects if they are there to be found?

The Cognitive Challenge

Attitudinal and participation (state) variables are often able to indicate whether or not *some* media effect has occurred, but they have not been very helpful in telling us much about the nature of media effectiveness. This has led reviewers to call for greater attention to the media's cognitive effects (e.g., Chaffee and Hochheimer, 1985 ; Rogers and Dearing, 1988).

Further, in electoral contexts, vote prediction via measures of affect has often held sway over understanding of cognitive effects. In typical attitudinal research, affect (re candidate preference) serves as an indicator of disposition or predisposition (Green, 1954). Cognition, narrowly interpreted as knowledge, only contributes to the attitudinal complex (Katz, 1960). We have Behaviorism to thank for this view. Having limited behavior to the body's movement toward or away from other objects, the concept of attitude was given the job of representing whatever led to that directed movement. Hence we have attitude's ambivalent and tautological specification as either disposition or predisposition.

The key to a better understanding of media effectiveness, potential as well as accomplished, seems to lie in our doing a better job of getting into the minds of media users. How do they mind? The Behaviorists' impoverished conceptualization needs dispelling.[1]

The question of understanding media effectiveness is crucial to the functional role -- and the future -- of mass media as servants of democratic society. If we are able to demonstrate only an occasional fact of this or that media effect but unable to comprehend the nature of media effectiveness, how are we to design the media we need for our polity's success and survival?[2]

This study reports how the three presidential candidates appear to have come across in the debates. We used a new methodology, Cognigraphics, to register and analyze what was uppermost in respondents' minds. Additional data from earlier Cognigraphic surveys help interpret these results in the electoral context.

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Methods

Before and after the 1992 debates, we surveyed students enrolled in a University of Washington undergraduate "Communication Process" course. Most of these students are not communication majors. The course meets a UW distribution requirement. We had surveyed cohorts of these students previously in this election year, early in the primary season (when Clinton was one of five major Democratic nominees) and later in the primary season (when Perot had become a contender). We also have cohort data on Bush from surveys conducted in 1991 during the Gulf War period.

The Cognigraphics method weds the Jungian word association tactic to a simple form of ideational mechanics.[3] The respondent first gives a word associate for each presented topic (here, the three candidates), then chooses the PIX option which best represents the relation of the topic to the word associate. The PIX options are presented to respondents as drawings:[4]

#1: Topic outside the word associate
#2: Word associate outside the topic
#3: Topic before/makes difference in word associate

#4: Word associate before/makes difference in topic

#5: Topic same as word associate

#6. Topic not same as word associate

Using the topic of George Bush and the word associate of "president," examples of the six PIX are:

#1: Bush has president as an attribute

#2: Bush is an instance of a president

#3: Bush makes a difference in the presidency

#4: The presidency makes a difference in Bush

#5: Bush and president are the same thing

#6: Bush is no president

A topic-word associate relationship can be reasonably interpreted several ways. So, one key to what people think is how they think. And it is clear that what people might come to think together will depend on their ability to make apparent how they are thinking about their common focus of attention.

The significance of thinking about a topic one way or another is a matter of some importance, as our previous work with Cognigraphics has shown. For example, all six of the Bush examples above come from respondent usage. An uninterpreted (topic-word association) relationship does not tell us enough about how people think. The use of PIX #3 often suggests greater topic consequentiality (Carter, Stamm, and Heintz-Knowles, 1993); the use of PIX #5 often suggests heightened respondent emotion, because it fails to make a distinction when common usage of the word associate implies such applicability (Carter and Stamm, 1993), In our presentation of the results we shall discuss further apparent implications.

Respondents' word associates also contribute to our analysis. The most frequent word associates tell us something. We can also code them for evidence of affect. In light of the thin slice we get from the top of cognitive activity, we consider this surface affect. This is not just to distinguish it from the more familiar attitudinal affect as measured, say, by Likert scales, but to remind us that expressing such content can elicit a response of, "Those are fighting words." Because this is freely expressed affect, we also have the advantage of not having solicited an expression of affect. Thus we can usefully view the ratio of affective to nonaffective word associates.

Examples of word associate and PIX usage were shown to students in class via overhead projection. Additional questions about the debates and election were then asked. These student cohorts do not constitute a random sample of the American voter population, but their responses do help us discover something about the nature of cognizing.[5]

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Results and Discussion

George Bush

Polls had been showing a decline in popularity for Bush as public attention turned from the Gulf War to the state of the domestic economy in an election year. But a response to a popularity poll, like the electoral vote, can be based on a variety of cognitions -- or perhaps none at all. What was going on cognitively? Would the debates change ideas about Bush?

We had begun auditing Bush Cognigraphically during the Gulf War, at the time of the United Nations entry, after we had obtained very unusual results for Saddam Hussein as a topic (Carter and Stamm, 1993). Respondents assigned Hussein quite a variety of word associates, many of them negative in affect (e.g., "mad," "dictator"). Whatever the word associate, however, they distinctively chose PIX #5. They equated him with these conditions; they did not view them as attributes (PIX #1). Very interestingly, respondents in the next cohort continued this practice and they also most often chose PIX #5 for Bush. Here, however, there was relatively little variety of word associate. "President" dominated. And affect was largely absent. We concluded that use of the #5 PIX indicated emotion due to the Gulf War, emotion which seemed to get in the way of more discriminating thoughts about these two war leaders.[6]

Table 1 shows our studies' history of "president" as a word associate for Bush. From the height of his post-war popularity to the beginning of the debates and on to their conclusion we see a sharp decline. Observer consensus before and after the election was that change would, and did, win. His failure to make domestic changes appears to have eroded his presidentiality.

Table 1. "President" as word associate for Bush: 1991-1992.

Survey date	Proportion of word associates
1/23/91 (N=111)	43.5%
3/14/91 (N=169)	64.3
2/12/92 (N=101)	37.6
10/7/92 (N=139)	30.1
10/22/92 (N=161)	22.8

Chi square = 53.4; 4 df; p < .001

Table 2 shows that word associates for Bush were not very affect-laden, either before or after the debates. Clinton and Perot, we shall see, drew more affect. Affect for Bush was down after the debates. Though not statistically significant, we can hardly miss the intimation that fewer people seemed to care one way or the other about him. What there was of affect was still about three to one negative over positive, which is clearly a significant difference. On positive affect, Bush benefitted very little from his debates performance. As we shall see later, Clinton and Perot, especially Perot, benefitted more from their debates performances.

Table 2. Affective word associate usage for Bush, before and after the debates.

	Affective usage (in % of all word associates):		
Time	Negative	Positive	Total affect
Before (N=139)	26.6%	6.5	33.1
After (N=161)	21.8	8.1	29.9

Chi square = 1.11; 2 df; p = n.s.

Table 3 shows that Bush PIX usage changed in two respects from before to after the debates. First, there was increasing use of #4 PIX. Differences were seen as being made in Bush instead of his making differences. In previous studies, the topic of environment elicited this kind of an idea. Things are thought to happen to it rather than it making something happen -- an important policy consideration. Second, #2 PIX usage decreased. This usage often suggests less topic significance than, say, #1 PIX usage. So the debates might have contributed to rescuing him from consignment to a category (that of ex-presidents, judging from the word associates).

We have also included PIX data from the Gulf War period to provide added context. Emotion (#5 PIX) had subsided from that level by the time of the debates. It did not rise much afterwards.

Table 3. PIX usage for Bush before and after the debates, and during the Gulf War.

PIX: (in %)

	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6	Total
1/23/91 (N=111)	29.7	10.8	16.2	3.6	36.9	2.7	99.9
Before (N=135)	20.7	20.7	21.5	8.1	26.7	2.2	99.9
After (N=151)	19.9	10.6	22.5	14.6	29.8	2.6	100.0

Chi square = 21.6; 10 df; p < .01

Table 3 affords us an opportunity to introduce a measure that we calculate from PIX usage. We call it the "Power Ratio." We add the #1 and #3 PIX usages and divide them by the #2 and #4 usages. We consider being included (#2) and being made a difference in (#4) evidence of less consequentiality than including (#1) and making a difference in (#3). On this measure, Bush was impressive when we entered the Gulf War: 3.19 (45.9% divided by 14.4%). But before the debates he was down to 1.47. And after the debates he was not much better -- 1.68, trailing both Clinton and Perot on this measure.

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William Clinton

Clinton had one advantage of sorts as the primaries began. About half of our respondents could not at that time even furnish a word associate for the other four Democratic candidates. Most could for Clinton. However, the most frequent of these were "scandal," "affair," "promiscuous," and so on (53.3% in all). One reason these students might have had so much of this on their minds was a discussion on recent tabloid coverage of Clinton in a previous class session.

When we surveyed another cohort in May, 96.6% of the respondents could furnish a word associate for Clinton. The sexual word associates had all but disappeared. "Democrat" (9.8%) and "slick" (7.6%) were the most frequent word associates. They still were just before the debates (10.4%; 7.6%, respectively), but "change" (4.9%) had joined them. The same three were most frequent after the debates, but their rankings were different ("slick," 11.9%; "change," 8.2%; "Democrat," 6.9%).

Table 4 shows that Clinton drew much more affect than Bush. We also see that the debates seemed to trigger a spurt in his affective word associates, and that this affect still tended to be negative. He did get something of a boost in positive affect from the debates. Clinton had elicited nearly as much affect in May as he did after the debates. Then, however, it was predominantly negative (46.7% to 4.3%)

Table 4. Affective word associate usage for Clinton, before and after the debates.

	Affective usage (in % of all word associates):		
Time	Negative	Positive	Total affect
Before (N=139)	25.2%	9.4	34.6
After (N=161)	32.9	19.3	52.2

Chi square = 10.7; 2 df; p < .01

When the primaries started, as we can see in Table 5, Clinton was not just making differences (PIX #3), differences were being made in him (PIX #4). The latter were the scandal and tabloid at work. Interestingly, the #4 PIX had all but disappeared by the time the primaries were over. But there is considerable indication of emotion (PIX #5),[7] only some of which is related to the very negative affect of that same period.

The post-primary emotion appears to have subsided by the time the debates began, to be somewhat stimulated by the debates, but not so much as affect was, even though the two are significantly correlated (phi = .18 before; phi =.23 after). There is no evidence that this post-debate increase in emotion was due to partisanship, because even though "Democrat" as a word associate increased slightly, these relationships were not interpreted with #5 PIX choices.

While Bush's Power Ratio increased only slightly after the debates, Clinton's surged upwards, from 1.83 to 2.92. Previously, in May, this measure had also been high (2.84), as he apparently recovered from the Gennifer Flowers exposure.

Table 5. PIX usage for Clinton before and after the primaries, and before and after the debates.

	PIX: (in %)						
	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6	Total
2/12/92 (N=80)	16.2	7.5	26.2	26.2	17.6	6.3	100.0
5/14/92 (N=81)	22.2	12.3	19.8	2.5	39.5	3.6	99.9
Before (N=136)	25.7	19.9	24.3	7.4	18.4	4.4	100.1
After (N=146)	26.0	11.0	28.1	7.5	24.7	2.7	100.0

Chi square = 51.8; 15 df; p < .001

***

Ross Perot

Perot's "out and back in" candidacy helped produce some of our strongest findings. His dropping out antagonized many, and he came to the debates handicapped in this respect. But the debates, particularly the last two, served him well. If change were to win the 1996 presidential election, as it seems to have won this one, it could be his turn.

The most frequent word associate for Perot was some variant of "rich." This ranged from 29.3% in May, when we first included him, to 20.5% just before and 18.8% just after the debates. Before the debates, the next most frequent word associate was "quitter" (8.6%). Afterwards, it was "businessman" (15.8%) -- and "quitter" was nearly gone (1.2%).

As Table 6 shows, affective response to Perot was minimal in May, but relatively high before the debates. Like Clinton in May, his predebate affect was almost all negative (as "quitter" suggests). Some of the total affect dissipated with the debates. Most strikingly, his post-debates affective response took a decided turn toward the positive.

Table 6. Affective word associate usage for Perot, before and after the debates and in May.

	Affective usage (in % of all word associates):		
Time	Negative	Positive	Total affect
5/14/92 (N=75)	9.3	9.3	18.6
Before (N=139)	45.3	4.3	49.6
After (N=161)	17.4	18.0	35.4

Chi square = 31.26; 2 df; p < .001

We found that the number of debates watched did not correlate significantly with either affect or PIX usage. (There is, however, an obvious tendency for those who watched the most often to favor Perot and for those who watched the least to favor Clinton.) Table 7 shows, in the correlation between watching particular debates and affect, that Perot clearly benefitted from the last two debates.

Table 7. Affective word associates for Perot by viewership of third and fourth presidential debates (in frequencies).

Third debate

	Didn't view	Viewed	
Positive:	7	22	
Negative	14	14	Chi square = 4.13; 1 df; p < .05

Fourth debate

	Didn't view	Viewed	
Positive:	11	18	
Negative	20	8	Chi square = 6.53; 1 df; p < .03

Table 8 shows us that considerable emotion (PIX #5) remained in October, before the debates, from Perot's summer withdrawal from the presidential campaign. Just over half of this accompanied negative affect in a variety of word associates, of which "quitter" was but one of many -- and not the strongest. Epithets are not uncommon word associates when negative affect is wedded to emotion.

The emotion appears to have dissipated with the debates. Perot's performance would seem to have been instrumental. Respondents turned to PIX #1 and #2 usages instead.

Perot, we see, never attained the PIX #3 usage that Bush and Clinton did. Thus, while his Power Ratio is relatively high after the primaries (2.83), this is due primarily to PIX #1 usages. By the time of the debates he had lost ground (2.42), and the debates evidently did nothing to improve that situation (2.00). In this regard, Clinton seems to have been seen as the more appropriate instrument for effecting needed change.

Table 8. PIX usage for Perot after the primaries, and before and after the debates.

	PIX: (in %)						
	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6	Total
5/14/92 (N=67)	40.3	16.4	10.4	1.5	28.4	3.0	100.0
Before (N=134)	29.9	11.2	17.2	8.2	31.3	2.2	100.0
After (N=149)	37.6	16.8	16.1	10.1	18.1	1.3	100.0

Chi square = 15.42; 10 df; $p < .10$

***

In Conclusion

Cognigraphics' word associates have shown us what was cognitively linked to the three 1992 presidential candidates, and of this how much was affective. Its PIX options have shown us more of that cognition and also allowed us to see where consequentiality and emotion played a part.

George Bush seems to have become less and less presidential after the Gulf War. He was also seen as less and less consequential. The debates seem to have done him and his candidacy very little good.

Negative affect plagued William Clinton all the way through the primaries and even after the debates. But he was seen as more and more consequential, a reasonable tool for bringing about change. We might well conclude that cognition, not affect, elected Clinton.

The debates might not have done Ross Perot's candidacy any good, as is indicated by the degree and kind of consequentiality shown in PIX usage. But his improvement in affect from before to after the debates, which can be traced to his performance in the last two debates, augers well for his credibility as a future candidate.

Finally, taken in conjunction with previous studies, these results suggest two conclusions. First, Cognigraphics can be a useful research tool for sorting out and exploring kinds of ideas and several conditions (affect and emotion) closely related to their expression. These conditions can make distinctive contributions and interact in various ways. They are not usefully compounded and confounded as attitudinal disposition. Second, in these debates much happened cognitively that needs to be understood if we are to adequately assess, and then improve, media performance in a democratic society.

##

Notes

1. The Behaviorist antipathy toward the cognitive sector of behavior still finds many adherents among mass communication researchers. Perhaps not all that conscious of their prejudice-by-adoption, they limit their conception of behavior to adient and abient movements of the body relative to other bodies. They must then try to understand cognition as somehow not "behavior" (only as a component of the hypothetical summary state variable, "attitude") when cognizing is, in fact, a crucial and structurally specifiable part of the *observing* sector in human behavior, comprising not only ideational thinking but such important behavioral features as cognitive nonsingularities (which control starting and stopping).

2. It is one thing to show that the mass media have something to do with what their audiences pay attention to. See "agenda setting" (Shaw and McCombs, 1972; and many others). It is something else to know what additional services they (or others) need to provide the public (Lippmann, 1922; Lasswell, 1948; Shaw and Martin, 1993; Carter, Stamm, and Heintz-Knowles, 1993). Ever since the pioneering 1960 presidential debates, we have been asking if the debates are worth doing and how we might do them better.

3. Where Jung used word association to dig into emotion-laden "complexes," we use it to study the "how" and "what" of current thinking, in anticipation of improving the "how" of future collective thinking. (See Carter, Stamm, and Heintz-Knowles, 1993.) Ideational mechanics comprises the basic kinds of cognitive elements and relations people use to describe what was and what is and to imagine what might be. (See: Carter, 1991.) Because to share ideas we must be able to understand each other's ideas, such tools as ideational

mechanics for sharing ideas are readily adaptable to the measurement of ideas held -- in this case by our respondents about the presidential candidates. (See: Carter, 1992.)

4. These six statements describe what the PIX look like. Each PIX covers a number of possible verbal equivalents. The six PIX are used instead of the 38 (so far) alternative verbalizations. (See Appendix A.) We ask respondents a third question, "Why did you select that PIX?" when we want closer specification of the idea represented. This not only clarifies the PIX usage; it sometimes reveals that the topic-word associate relationship is part of a larger idea, and thereby occasionally enables us to withdraw our incredulity that such an idea could be held. Overall, such questioning casts grave doubt on any assumption that thinking is innately linked to language usage. The ideas we find are visual as well as verbal. Expectations of PIX usage for a given word associate based on such syntactic familiars as adjective-noun are often proved misleading by our data. For example, a familiar "adjective" might be assigned PIX #3 instead of PIX #1 if the topic (say, Clinton) had demonstrated in the debates a capability (to make this difference maker).

5. Perhaps the best analogy for this technique is the physicist's bubble chamber, which made it possible to see a variety of collision consequences. Their interpretation, along with the subsequent development of much more sophisticated observational contexts, depended upon a parallel development in theory. The progeny of Cognigraphics should be psychlotrons.

6. Parallel surveys of Fidel Castro and Mikhael Gorbachev as topics revealed much different PIX profiles. For them and their word

associates, #2 PIX were chosen significantly more often. (See: Carter and Stamm, _op_. _cit_.)

7. Jung (and Freud) might have been fascinated that an emotional state was to be found after what might have been the precipitating event's cognitive content had disappeared from the top of the mind.

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Appendix A

PIX and Verbalizations

Some common verbalizations can be seen as instances of the various PIX....

1. W.A. inside of T

1.1. W.A. is quality of T
1.2. W.A. is property of T
1.3. W.A. is component of T
1.4. W.A. is member of T
1.5. W.A. is example of T
1.6 W.A. is development in T
1.7. W.A. is to be found in T
1.8. W.A. is essence of T

2. T inside of W.A.

2.1. T is quality of W.A.
2.2. T is property of W.A.
2.3. T is component of W.A.
2.4. T is member of W.A.
2.5. T is example of W.A.
2.6. T is development in W.A.
2.7. T is to be found in W.A.
2.8. T is essence of W.A.

3. T comes before W.A.

3.1. T makes a difference in W.A.
3.2. T produces W.A.
3.3. T helps produce W.A.
3.4. T is necessary for W.A.
3.5. T is catalyst for W.A.
3.6. W.A. follows T
3.7. T triggers W.A.

4. W.A. comes before T

4.1. W.A. makes a difference in T
4.2. W.A. produces T
4.3. W.A. helps produce T
4.4. W.A. is necessary for T
4.5. W.A. is catalyst for T
4.6. T follows W.A.
4.7. W.A. triggers T

5. T is same as W.A.

5.1. T and W.A. are similar in one way
5.2. T and W.A. are similar in several respects
5.3. T is identical with W.A.
5.4. T is not different from W.A.

6. T is not same as W.A.

6.1. T differs from W.A. in one way
6.2. T differs from W.A. in several respects
6.3. T is the opposite of W.A.
6.4. T is inconsistent with W.A.

Appendix B

EXAMPLE EXAMPLE EXAMPLE EXAMPLE

The Media Agenda

This brief exercise will help us to explore some of the ways in which people respond to topics they encounter in the mass media.

1. To begin, would you please write down (in Column 1) the first word that comes to your mind for each of these topics:

(Ignore Column 2 for now.)

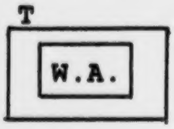
TOPIC	1. WORD ASSOCIATE	2. RELATIONSHIP
Baseball	sport	2
Politics	corruption	3
Men	women	6
Environment	trees	1

2. Now for each of the word associates, select the relationship below that comes closest to describing the relationship (in your mind) between the topic (T) and the word associate (W.A.).

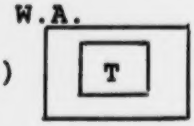
Then put the appropriate number for the relationship under Relationship in Column 2 above. Be especially careful to watch which is the word associate and which is the topic in the relationship.

Inside-outside relations (where one is quality, part, etc. of the other)

(1)

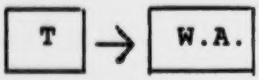


(2)

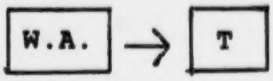


Before-after relations and/or where one makes a difference in the other

(3)

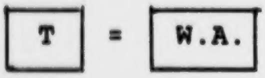


(4)

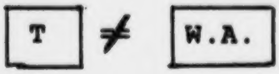


Similarity & Difference relations

(5)



(6)



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Moving to the Front of the Bus?: Network Coverage of the Invisible Primaries During the 1988 and 1992 Elections

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Presented to the Radio-Television Journalism Division of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication annual convention, Kansas City, August 1993.

Moving to the Front of the Bus?: Network Coverage of the Invisible Primaries During the 1988 and 1992 Elections

As the power of the political party machinery to influence the presidential nomination process has continued to wane, television has emerged as the main platform on which candidates present their message to the voters[1]--much to the chagrin of newspaper reporters. As one veteran print reporter lamented as he watched television camera crews muscle ahead of big city newspaper reporters to the front of the candidate's bus, "The cold essence of presidential campaigning has become the television camera lens... Reporters for newspapers and magazines have been nudged, figuratively and literally to the back of the bus by the steady, inexorable encroachment of television."[2]

While researchers and political pundits have noted that candidates have increasingly tailored their campaigns to suit television throughout the election, most studies have concentrated on the influence of the media during the primaries and general election campaign. Few studies have examined television coverage during what researcher Arthur Hadley[3] characterizes as the "invisible primaries"--the period before the nominating process begins--even though observers note that the media have their greatest potential influence on the electorate during the preprimaries and the early primaries when voters' knowledge of most candidates and of important campaign issues are at their lowest ebb.[4]

This study will examine network evening news coverage of the major declared Democratic candidates[5] during the two years before the 1988 and 1992 nominating campaigns to determine if any coverage patterns emerge.

During the invisible primaries, candidates try to establish their credibility as viable candidates and try to gather the resources needed to wage a successful nominating campaign: donations, endorsements, volunteers and media coverage.[6]

Generally, a candidate cannot even make the list of serious candidates unless he or she is dubbed by the media as a presidential hopeful. Television, along with national newspapers and magazines, act as the Great Mentioner. Political reporters from the major media size up those who seek to be president and judge which ones are presidential timber. Those candidates judged by the major media to be serious candidates are treated by pollsters, party activists and other reporters as such.[7] Candidates not considered viable are eliminated even before the selection process begins. Their names may appear on ballots, but they are not listed in polls, they are not invited to campaign events such as debates and they are not covered by the media.

Past studies indicate that political reporters from major newspapers and newsmagazines play the initial role in determining who should be considered as serious candidates for the presidency because these writers cover Washington regularly and their opinions are respected.[8] Television relies on the print media to decide which candidates to cover.[9] However, television ultimately determines which candidates will be viewed as serious. Because the public gets most of its campaign information from television, TV coverage is the main way hopefuls can establish themselves as viable candidates. Therefore, one of the main focuses of candidates during the preprimaries is to get free mentions on TV news and talk shows.[10]

Second, television and other media do not distribute coverage equally among the serious candidates. Rather, they perform what Robinson and Sheehan[11] have characterized as "journalistic triage." Candidates are rated as front-runners, challengers and hopeless cases based on such factors as poll standings, organizational and financial strength, ability to gain endorsements and performance in debates and straw polls.[12] This "triage" influences amount and tone of coverage and ultimately the selection process.

Those candidates judged to be front-runners or top challengers will be showered with attention, most of it positive. On the other hand, those labeled as "hopeless cases" will be largely ignored by the media. What coverage they receive is "death-watch coverage"--stories that monitor the poor health of their campaigns.[13] The media, then, can contribute to a self-fulfilling prophesy. Those given heavy coverage can expect their poll standings to rise even further. Those ignored by the press as hopeless cases can expect their standings in the polls to slide and may have difficulty attracting the workers and dollars needed to support a viable campaign.[14] The media, then, can influence who the public views as viable during the preprimaries.

Most studies concentrate on one election. But by restricting attention to coverage in one campaign, it is difficult to determine if results represent a pattern or are unique to that campaign. While past studies have found some similarities in coverage across campaigns--such as the media's fixation on the horse race[15]--comparisons between elections yield some differences. For instance, while studies of the 1984 election suggest journalists focused most of their attention during the preprimaries on early favorites Walter Mondale and John Glenn,[16] they parceled out coverage evenly during the preprimaries of the 1988 election because no one had emerged as a clear favorite.[17]

This study will examine preprimary coverage for the Democrats during 1986-87 for the 1988 campaign and 1990-91 for the 1992 election. The two invisible primary seasons shared several similarities. In both elections, most of the candidates were little known. Political pundits, in fact, poked fun at the candidates' obscurity, calling them the "seven dwarfs"[18] in 1988 and the "six pack"[19] in 1992. In both elections a clear front-runner did not emerge until the end of the preprimaries or the beginning of the primary season. Dukakis and Clinton emerged from the pack as potential front-runners when political observers realized these candidates had put together the strongest organizations to run a successful campaign.[20]

But the two elections differed in amount of campaign activity. Because the 1988 election did not feature an incumbent, hopefuls from both parties began campaigning even before the 1984 general election campaign began. For instance, *Newsweek* reported that several Democrats were at the 1984 Democratic convention shoring up support for a run in 1988.[21] Candidates were making repeated trips to Iowa as early as 1985 in order to woo supporters; Richard Gephardt and Bruce Babbitt had virtually set up permanent residence in Iowa.[22] In contrast, the Gulf War squelched interest in most domestic stories in late 1990 and early 1991, including the election. George Bush's soaring popularity in the wake of the Gulf War kept most Democrats on the sidelines. Most candidates did not campaign in earnest until summer 1991.

This study of the 1988 and 1992 preprimaries will compare amount of network evening news campaign coverage for the declared Democratic candidates in 1986 and 1987 and again in 1990 and 1991. Amount of coverage for the two eventual nominees, Dukakis and Clinton, will be compared as will coverage for these two front-runners and the other candidates in the campaign. Finally, coverage will be broken down by network. This study will answer the following questions:

1. How did television network evening news programs differ in amount of coverage given to the Democratic candidates in the 1988 and 1992 preprimaries?

2. Were there distinctive differences in coverage patterns during the two campaigns?

3. How did the two front-runners, Dukakis and Clinton, differ in amount of coverage and in coverage patterns?

4. What were the similarities and differences in coverage between the front-runners and the other candidates in the two preprimaries?

5. How did the three networks differ in their coverage of the candidates during the two preprimaries?

Methods

This study examined network evening news coverage for each of the major declared Democratic candidates in the two years before the 1988 and 1992 presidential campaigns. The Vanderbilt University *Television News Index and Abstracts* was used to determine how often candidates were mentioned in network evening news reports during 1986 and 1987 and again in 1990 and 1991.

Because Vanderbilt only archives the network news broadcasts, this study cannot analyze other electronic platforms for the candidates such as call-in programs, talk shows, morning news programs and electronic town meetings. But while political observers noted that candidates tried to bypass the traditional media (i.e. the networks, the major newspapers and news magazines and news wires) and present their message directly to the people through these so-called "new media,"[23] the traditional media still play the preeminent role in the elections.[24] The threshold for making the network evening news programs is particularly high; only candidates who have achieved significant visibility in other media are likely to be mentioned on these programs. Thus, network news represents the high end of coverage, and visibility on these elite programs implies wider visibility on other media, both traditional and new.

This study examined only stories which mentioned the presidential hopefuls as candidates. Stories listed in the index under "Presidential Election Campaign (1992) and (1988)" were considered to be election stories. Stories which mentioned candidates outside the context of the campaign were excluded. Candidates were mentioned 476 times during the two years leading up to the 1988 election and 161 times in the two years before the 1992 campaign.

The unit of analysis was the mention of a candidate in a television election story. Any one story, then, could include mentions of several candidates. The two coders were instructed to note only whether or not a candidate appeared in the story, not to total how many times his name appeared. Stories appearing in December 1987 and 1991 were double coded to check intercoder reliability. Intercoder reliability was 96 percent.[25]

Results

The networks paid considerably more attention to the campaign in 1988 than 1992, but coverage patterns were similar (Figure 1).

While newspapers and magazines were speculating which candidates would enter the race and which one would win early in the preprimaries,[26] television largely waited until the year before the campaign to begin covering it. This was particularly true for 1992 when candidates were mentioned only three times before 1991.

The amount of coverage differed markedly in 1987 and 1991. The television networks ran nearly three times more stories each month in 1987 than in 1992 (37.5 to 13.25 stories). The difference was particularly acute in May when the networks ran 65 stories in 1987 compared to just four in 1991. These disparities reflect the different nature of the campaigns. No candidate, save Paul Tsongas, had even declared his intention to run by summer of 1991. Yet, Richard Gephardt had already spent 64 days of campaigning in Iowa by April 1987.[27] When Paul Simon decided to enter the race in May 1987, pundits speculated whether he had entered too late to mount a serious campaign. In May 1991 political observers were still wondering where the candidates were.[28]

But despite the disparity in amount of coverage, patterns of coverage for 1987 and 1991 were similar. Labor Day marks the traditional start of the general election campaign and interest appeared to build in both preprimaries during September. While figures for September 1987 were inflated by the revelation that Joseph Biden had cribbed part of his campaign speech from British Labor Party Leader

Neil Kinnock, September coverage surpassed other months in both elections.

After the September kickoff, television coverage dipped in October and November for both 1987 and 1991 before jumping again in December.

Front-runners Bill Clinton and Michael Dukakis received similar television coverage at the beginning and the tailend of their preprimary efforts, but got different coverage in the middle (Figure 2). Both of the eventual front-runners were completely ignored by the media two years before the first primary despite being touted by the print media as strong candidates for the nomination.[29] Clinton and Dukakis both saw their coverage skyrocket at the end of preprimary campaign when they begin rising in the polls.

However, television treated the eventual nominees differently during most of the year before the nominating campaign. Clinton's coverage steadily climbed as it became increasingly clear that he was the candidate best positioned to win his party's nomination.[30] Dukakis' coverage was much more erratic. The press showered more attention on him in the wake of Hart and Biden's departure from the campaign, but withdrew coverage temporarily in the month after that.

Figures 3 and 4 compare the amount of mentions for Clinton and Dukakis with coverage for the "average candidate" and the "top candidate." The average candidate represents the average score of all the other candidates beside Clinton or Dukakis. The top candidate is the score for whichever candidate other than Clinton or Dukakis that had the most mentions each month.

Figures for both Clinton and Dukakis more resembled the average candidate than the top candidate throughout most of the campaign. Both Dukakis and Clinton only served as the top candidates once until December. However, the pattern changed in December. Clinton topped the list of mentions and Dukakis finished a close second behind Paul Simon, who was leading in the Iowa Polls. Both Clinton and Dukakis received considerably more mentions than the average candidate in December. These results, coupled with the fact that coverage increased markedly in December, suggests that December marks the month where television has the greatest influence during the preprimaries. The candidate or candidates who are touted as the favorites in December enter the nominating campaign with considerable momentum.

Past studies suggest that because of shared news values, formalized news gathering procedures, and organizational structures, networks will differ little in their selection of stories in general[31] and election stories in particular.[32] This study supports these findings.

While the amount of coverage varied greatly between 1988 and 1992, there were no significant differences in how the individual networks covered the candidates (Table 1). Percentages for most candidates across the three networks were almost identical in the 1988 election. Some differences did appear before the 1992 campaign. In 1992, NBC devoted more attention to Clinton and CBS favored Harkin, but differences were not statistically significant.

Robinson and Sheehan claim the media perform a journalistic triage, ranking candidates as front-runners, top contenders and also-rans. There was little evidence that network news performed this triage during the invisible primaries of either election. All of the candidates, except Al Gore and Gary Hart, received almost identical coverage in 1987. Similarly, all but Brown received similar coverage overall in 1991.

A triage effect did seem to manifest itself as the end of the preprimaries. Dukakis and Simon received the most mentions in December 1987, while Gephardt, Jackson and Hart were top contenders.[33] Gore, who had pulled his workers out of Iowa and New Hampshire to concentrate on the South, was temporarily put on hold. Similarly, a triage was more apparent in December 1991 than in the preprimary period as a whole. Eventual winner Clinton received the most mentions, with Kerrey, Harkin and Tsongas treated as top challengers. Wilder and Brown were written off as also-rans.

Discussion

This paper has provided contrasting snapshots of two preprimary campaigns where the resources directed towards the candidates and their activities varied widely. In 1988, candidates started their activities earlier than ever before and network interest in the campaign intensified a full 18 months in advance. Indeed, the consensus among pundits was that Paul Simon began the campaign too late when he announced in May 1987. In that month, network coverage was 10 times higher than it was four years later. In May 1991, presidential campaign coverage was still just a blip on the network agenda--crowded out by more pressing world events. It was not until November 1991 that any similarity of coverage arose and not until December until the two campaigns achieved parity.

During this fragile preprimary season, the networks exhibited extraordinary elasticity in their coverage. Is there another country in the world where the television coverage would fluctuate so wildly from one campaign to another? A major advantage of the shorter campaign run in nearly all industrialized countries is the consistency of media attention to the campaign. There is a set agenda where intense coverage dominates for a few weeks. In America, however, numerous variables influence the process. If an American presidential campaign (as gauged by network coverage) can range from 11 months as it did in 1992 to 21 months in 1988, how much influence can the networks exert in bringing the campaign to the public's attention?

Are the networks simply following the news flow or are they influencing coverage according to their own resources, interest and obligations? After the Gulf War, all American newsgathering organizations were facing significant budget deficits and pared down their campaign coverage budgets accordingly. Had there been intense campaign activity in the primary states, would the networks have risen to the occasion with coverage or would the coverage have been minimal regardless of budget? Certainly, candidate activity dropped considerably from 1987 to 1991. Yet, the huge gap between the two invisible primaries suggests that both the high coverage in 1987 and the low coverage in 1991 might have been pre-ordained. There was not much interest among the networks in hyping the 1992 campaign as there was in 1988 when the networks were falling over themselves to get exclusive stories. In a period where little else was happening, the promotions of the news programs focused in the presidential arena. Competitive worth was measured by perceived network performance in the presidential campaign. Thus, the campaign became an internecine battleground for the networks apart from the reality of the political campaign. In 1988, it made economic as well as journalistic sense to focus resources on the political campaign as early as possible.

Television networks may focus attention on the preprimaries because election coverage can be planned even before the candidates begin campaigning. Indeed, network executives and major newspapers began planning 1992 coverage early in response to stinging criticisms from political observers and the public that they focused too much on both the horse race and the canned themes of the candidates and too little on analyzing issues and candidate claims and on examining voter concerns.[34] Network organizations gravitate towards the political campaign as a safe, predictable, and high profile area to dedicate their resources. In many ways, American news organizations have manufactured demand for this type of coverage by making it ritualistic. The candidates take their cues from major newsgathering organizations. If early forays to Iowa and New Hampshire attract major attention, candidates accelerate the pace of their campaign for fear of being left out, reinforcing their instincts towards an early start. Conversely, as in 1991, if candidates are ignored during the early months of the pre-election year, breathing space is created for late arrivals. Jerry Brown, for example, was not hurt by arriving on the scene late in the fall of 1991, a date that would have precluded candidacy in 1988. Viewers have been conditioned to expect candidates to emerge more than a year before the election. Excitement builds as the press begins to scrutinize the candidates, searching for a front-runner. Once interest has been piqued early, as in the 1988 campaign, the stakes become extremely high. Gary Hart's fall from grace in May 1987 was treated as the pre-eminent national news story even though the election was nearly one-and-a-half years away. While the Democrats obviously had enough time to find a suitable replacement for a fallen front-runner, the event was covered as if the election were imminent and the results catastrophic. All of this high-profile coverage occurred long before all but one of the

1992 Democratic candidates had even declared his intentions to run.

The media's intense scrutiny of the early days of the 1988 campaign may have convinced some candidates to remain on the sidelines until late in the 1992 preprimaries. Those who begin to campaign early risk exposing themselves longer to intense character examinations by the press and risk losing support from the people before the campaign even begins. As Mike McCurry press secretary for former Arizona Gov. Bruce Babbitt in 1988, noted, "People don't want candidates running for president for three years. We went through the Sominex Six in 1984 and the Seven Dwarfs in 1988. It literally diminishes the candidates to be exposed" for such a long time.[35]

Given this wild variability in campaign length and coverage, what should be the norm? Do the networks have the ability to perpetuate 18-month campaigns or are they simply victims of a flawed process? Will the preprimaries of 1996 resemble 1988 or 1992? Much might depend on the financial health of the industry. If the networks have recovered their vitality through an infusion of profitable prime time news programs, the incentives for coverage might be quite high. Competition from CNN, which emerged after the Persian Gulf War and the 1992 campaign as the fourth major news network, might also spur the networks to devote more attention to the campaign in 1996. On the other hand, newsgathering organizations may realize that the downside in marathon campaigns is that they steal attention from other stories. For instance, poor reporting of the savings and loan and HUD scandals may have been caused partially by the 20-month dominance of campaign coverage in 1987. Early coverage also risks boring the public and alienating them from the campaign before it officially begins.

Regardless of whether the campaign is short (by American standards) or long, it is apparent from this study that the December before the primary season is a watershed month where the coverage coalesces around a few individuals in anticipation of the primary season and the public engages in the process.[36] Presumably, few Americans would say they were slighted in 1991 by not having threefold more preprimary coverage as they had in 1987. In was precisely in the December before the primaries when both Michael Dukakis and Bill Clinton emerged as serious candidates.

The two eventual nominees, Dukakis and Clinton, were virtually ignored early on by the Great Mentioner. Their lack of coverage early on demonstrates that a candidate does not need long, sustained mentions to emerge as a serious candidate--as Doug Wilder and Bob Kerrey painfully discovered. Both Wilder and Kerrey were touted early as serious candidates,[37] but they were the first two candidates to fall by the wayside. Being frequently mentioned as a serious candidate does not automatically translate into electoral viability. The candidate must build on that ephemeral momentum with a strong organization and a substantive agenda and must also be able to connect well with the voters in order enter the primary season as a leading presidential hopeful.

The elections of 1988 and 1992 provide contrasting portraits of how television covers political campaigns, but provided few clues as to future directions. The trend reversal toward abbreviated coverage in 1992 was caused primarily by external factors. Coverage in 1995 will no doubt reveal the normative state.

Candidates gear their campaign to catch the attention of the nightly network news. But below that national forum lies a plethora of opportunities in both print and broadcast which are becoming increasingly important. Ross Perot's swift emergence on the national scene after exposure on the "Larry King Show" on CNN forced the mainstream media to take notice. Thus, while television has acted as final arbiter in recent elections in deciding who should or should not be considered a serious candidate, Perot's candidacy suggests that talk shows and other "new media" could play a significant role in boosting particular candidates in the future. Studies of the future campaigns, then, should include the role of the "new media" in the election process.

1Bruce Buchanan, *Electing a President: The Markel Commission Research on Campaign '88* (Austin, TX: University of Austin Press, 1991), 168; Nelson W. Polsby and Aaron Wildavsky, *Presidential Elections: Contemporary Strategies of American Politics* (New York: The Free Press), 45; William Crotty and John Jackson III, *Presidential Primaries and Nominations* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1985), 74-78; Richard Davis, *The Press and American Politics: The New Mediator* (New York: Longman, 1992), 7-8; Norman Nie, Sidney Verba and John Petrocik, *The Changing American Voter* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1971).

2Joel Swerdlow, "Decline of the Boys on the Bus," *Washington Journalism Review*, January/February 1981, 16.

3Arthur T. Hadley, *The Invisible Primary* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1979).

4Christine F. Ridout, "The Role of Media Coverage of Iowa and New Hampshire in the 1988 Democratic Nomination," *American Politics Quarterly*, 19 (January 1991):43-58; Richard Joslyn, *Mass Media and Elections* (Reading, M.A.: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1984), 120; Gary R. Orren and Nelson W. Polsby, "New Hampshire: Springboard of Nomination Politics," in Gary R. Orren and Nelson W. Polsby, eds., *Media and Momentum: The New Hampshire Primary and Nomination Politics* (Chatham, N.J.: Chatham House Publishers, 1987), 3-4; Donald R. Matthews, "'Winnowing': The News Media and the 1976 Presidential Race," in James D. Barber, ed., *Race for the Presidency: The Media and the Nominating Process* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1978), 55-78; Kurt Lang and Gladys Engel Lang, "The Mass Media and Voting," in Eugene Burdick and Arthur J. Brodbeck, eds., *American Voting Behavior* (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1959); Thomas R. Marshall, "The News Verdict and Public Opinion During the Primaries," in William C. Adams, ed., *Television Coverage of the 1980 Presidential Campaign* (Norwood, N.J.: ABLEX Publishing, 1983); Crotty and Jackson, *Presidential Primaries*; Hadley, *Invisible Primary*.

5This study will be restricted to the Democratic candidates because all of their candidates (except for Gary Hart and Jesse Jackson in 1988) were relatively unknown. These candidates relied on the press to boost their name recognition and support. While Patrick Buchanan and David Duke challenged George Bush in 1992, he was the clear favorite to capture his party's nomination regardless of amount of press attention.

6Rhodes Cook, "'Invisible Primary' a Crucial Period," *Congressional Quarterly*, Aug. 17, 1991, 2306; Hadley, *Invisible Primary*.

[7] Donald R. Matthews, "Presidential Nominations: Processes and Outcomes," in James D. Barber, ed., *Choosing the President* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1974); Davis, *The Press and American Politics*, 256-257; Hadley, *Invisible Primary*, 175-188; Joslyn, *Mass Media and Elections*, 120-122.

[8] Hadley, *Invisible Primary*, 181-188; Joslyn, *Mass Media and Elections*, 121.

[9] Hadley, *Invisible Primary*, 187-188.

[10] Hadley, *Invisible Primary*, 175-175; Joslyn, *Mass Media and Elections*, 121.

[11] Michael J. Robinson and Margaret Sheehan, *Over the Wire and on TV: CBS and UPI Coverage in Campaign '80* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1983), 66-81.

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[34] *Covering the Primaries* (New York: The Freedom Forum Media Studies Center, 1992), 22-34; Edwin Diamond, "Getting it Right."

[35] Rhodes Cook, "Late Start for '92," 764.

[36] Political observers contend that the public know little about the candidates early in the campaign; their support of presidential hopefuls is based on name recognition (Richard Morin, "In Praise of Early Polls," *Washington Post*, Aug. 23, 1987). However, by January about 42 percent of the public are paying attention to the campaign and that figure jumps to 67 percent by the first primaries (Michael Oreskes, "Winners in the First Presidential Tests Gain National Support, Poll Finds," *New York Times*, Feb. 23, 1988, A1.

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Figure 1--Total number of campaign mentions in the two years before the 1988 and 1992 presidential nominating campaigns

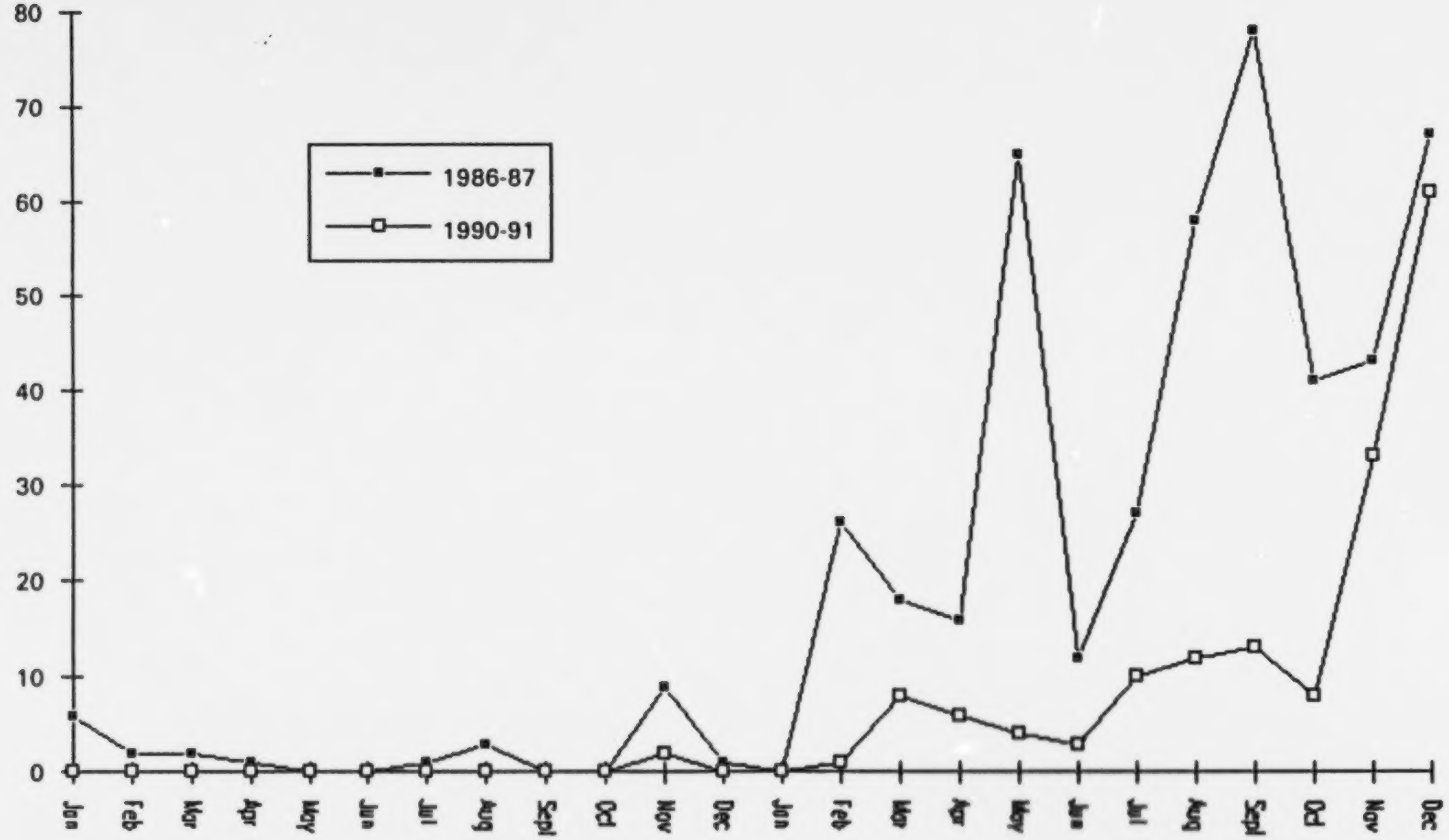


Figure 2-- Total number of campaign mentions for Michael Dukakis and Bill Clinton in the two years before the 1988 and 1992 presidential elections

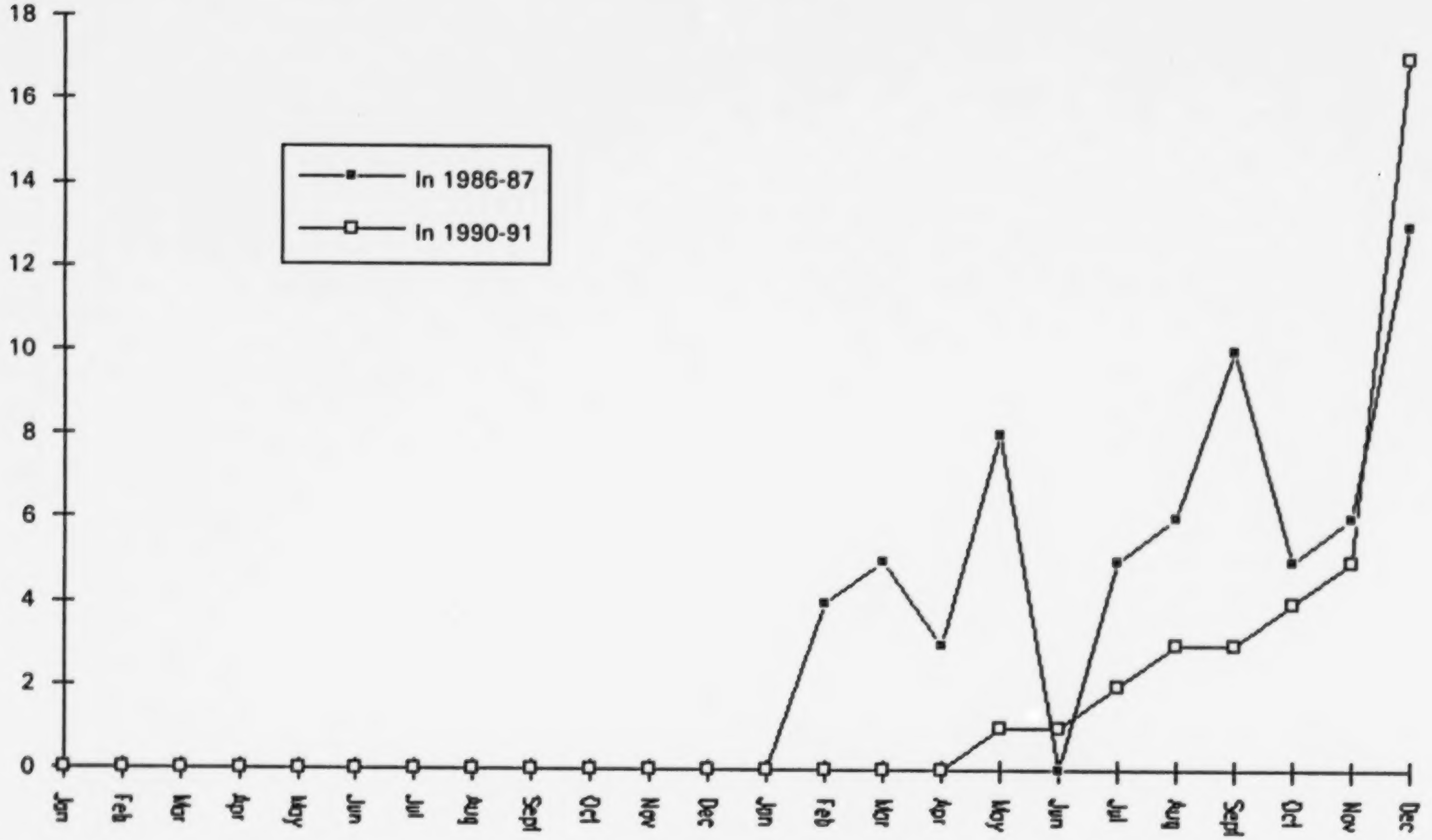


Figure 3-- Total number of campaign mentions for Michael Dukakis vs the "top candidate" and the "average candidate" in the two years before the 1988 Democratic nominating campaign

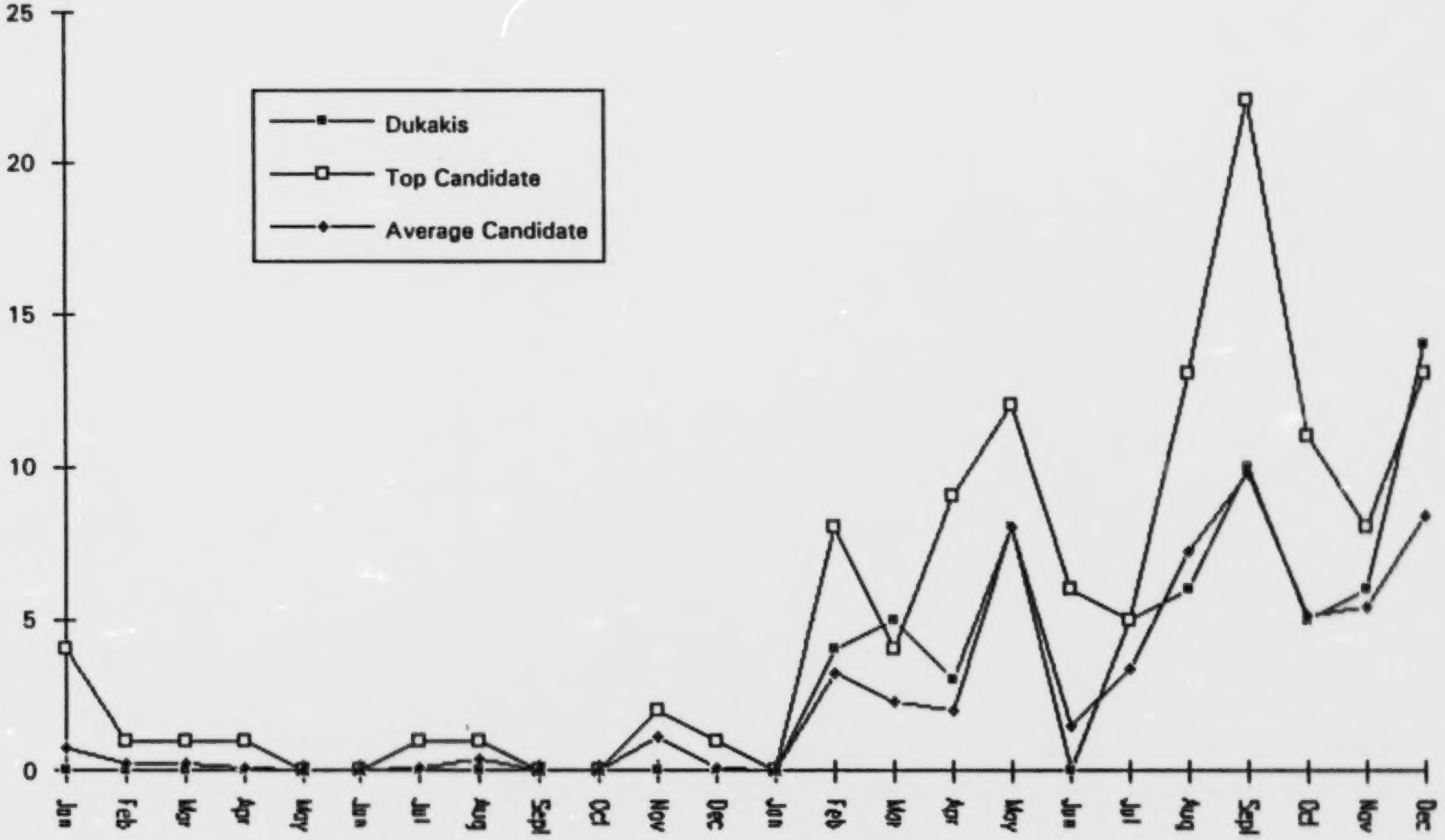
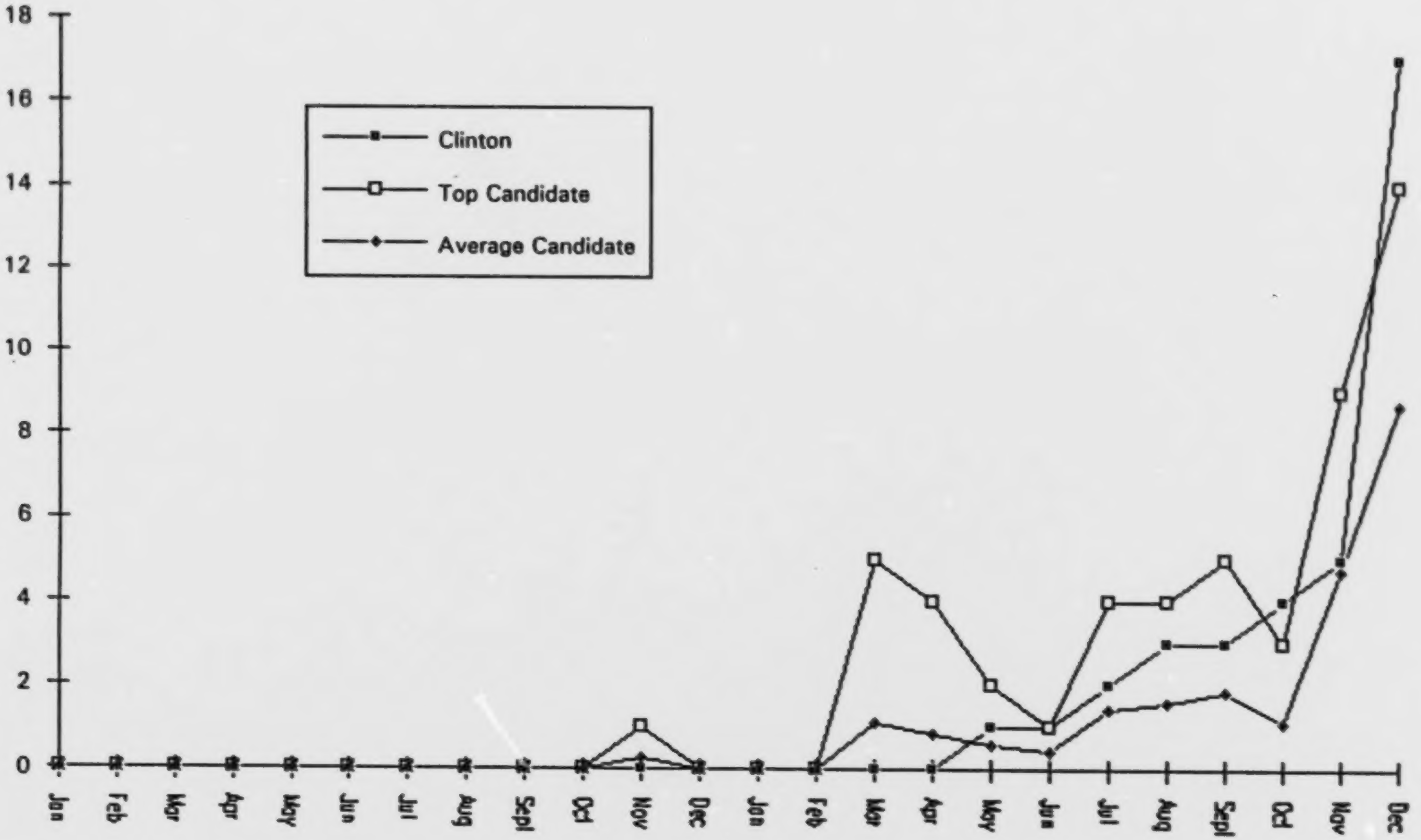


Figure 4--Total number of campaign mentions for Bill Clinton vs the "top candidate" and the "average candidate" in the two years before the 1992 Democratic nominating campaign



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Information Presentation and Issue Salience: Their Relationships with Voter Decision-Making Strategies

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Presented to the Communication Theory and Methodology Division,
Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication convention
Kansas City, Aug. 11-14, 1993

Media have traditionally devoted a preponderance of their political election coverage to a candidate's image, rather than focusing on the political issues themselves (see, for example, Windhauser, 1977). In the 1992 election season, however, several news organizations attempted different approaches to campaign coverage. For example, in Charlotte, North Carolina, *The Observer* teamed with local broadcaster WSOC-TV and the Poynter Institute of St. Petersburg, Florida, to "help voters regain control of the issues." Editor Richard Oppel promised readers that the joint effort would use intensive polling to determine issues deemed important by voters and conduct interviews of candidates to delve into those issues (Oppel, 1992). This sentiment was echoed at an American Society of Newspaper Editors conference in April 1992, where a panel discussion considered whether newspapers, to compete more effectively against broadcast media, needed to supply substantive coverage of the issues being debated in the election (Gersh, 1992).

If media find merit in changing traditional campaign coverage, many questions might be raised about the potential impact on the political process. Would the manner of information presentation affect how voters decide for whom to cast their ballots? Would different issues and their coverage impact voters' decision-making process? Would "personal" issues influence the voting decision differently than "policy" issues? In an attempt to answer these questions, this research examined whether the manner of information presentation or the salience of issues affect the use of decision-making strategies.[1]

A great deal of research in behavioral science in general and consumer research in particular examines a *choice process*. According to some psychologists, choice is an everyday occurrence in which a decision-maker must decide between two or more conflicting alternatives using his or her cognitive capacity to process information, reduce conflict, and reach a decision (Sheth & Newman, 1985). Each decision-maker is assumed to be rational, and the end product of this processing is an attitude, or a "predisposition to respond in a particular way toward a specified class of objects" (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1972). Many dispute the influence attitudes have over behavior; however, in behavioral decision research, attitudes are generally thought to be strong "precursors of behavior" (Beisecker & Parson, 1972).[2]

Decision-making Models

If one option clearly dominates all other alternatives on attributes deemed important, the selection is relatively easy. In real life, however, conflict often arises when one option does not clearly dominate across all attributes. In such situations, marketing researchers commonly assume that "decisions are made by considering the extent to which one is willing to trade off more of one valued attribute against less of another valued attribute" (Payne, Bettman & Johnson, 1992). In this *compensatory model* "positive and negative data on several attributes can balance, offset, or compensate one another" (Bettman, 1979). The compensatory model -- with its complex process of weighting, summing, and indexing attributes -- shares some theoretical commonality with certain models of voter behavior such as "the spatial theory of voting" (see Hinich & Pollard, 1981; Herstein, 1981).

Human decision-making, however, is hard to conceive as being purely rational. While information processing in decision-making may be purposeful, "humans lack both the knowledge and computational skills necessary to make decisions in a manner compatible with economic notions of rational behavior" (Hogarth, 1987). Thus, it became apparent that the compensatory model's predictive and descriptive power was "bounded" (i.e., limited) to certain choice situations.

Hence, *non-compensatory* strategies have also been theorized. In these approaches a high value on one attribute cannot compensate for a low value on another; therefore, "trade-offs may not be made explicitly in many cases" (Payne, Bettman & Johnson, 1992). Non-compensatory models avoid conflict between differential evaluations of attributes by circumventing compensatory "trade-offs"

(Hogarth, 1987). Subsequent research has identified a number of decision models, strategies, and heuristics used by decision-makers to process information, all of which fall under the broad rubrics of either compensatory or non-compensatory processing. Of the models, two basic characteristics are common to most:

> 1) *Direction of processing*. Information processing in decision making is organized around alternatives/objects, or around attributes. Decision makers function by proceeding from attribute to attribute across alternatives ("interdimensional"), or by evaluating all of one alternative's attributes before proceeding to another alternative's attributes ("intradimensional") (Wright, 1975; Payne, 1982; Sundstroem, 1989).
>
> 2) *Use of information in making a final choice*. Subjects may process all information available to them or their evaluation may be based on only some of the information. In the compensatory model, all information is used in evaluating alternatives and making a choice. In the non-compensatory model, choices are made based on only some of the information.

Discerning under what conditions a compensatory or non-compensatory decision strategy is operative has been an important issue for marketing research. Several studies have found that a "two-stage" pattern of decision-making is often used. Since compensatory processing requires a great deal of cognitive effort, non-compensatory models are often used to narrow the available alternatives based on a few salient or important attributes (Hogarth, 1987; Wright & Barbour, 1975; Bettman, 1979). In experimental research, the compensatory model has been found to operate only when the number of alternatives and attributes were kept relatively small (Wilkie & Pessemier, 1973). This suggests that the choice of decision-making model may be contingent on features of the choice problem and the information provided. Further, this choice may not be strictly compensatory or non-compensatory, but rather somewhere along a continuum between these strategies.

Information Presentation

While few marketing studies have manipulated the physical format of the information, implicit in most work is a distinction between two approaches to information presentation: by alternative (brand) or by attribute (characteristics of the brand).[3] Contradictory conclusions have been reached about which approach consumers prefer; some may simply choose the strategy easiest to use for a given information format (Bettman, 1979).

Some research has varied the format of information on supermarket display boards. Decision alternatives were displayed in a three-dimensional alternative-by-attribute matrix (Bettman & Jacoby, 1975), with the conclusion that "an increase in the number of alternatives and in the number of attributes results in the use of a smaller proportion of information available" (see also Sundstroem, 1989).

Two display board studies did attempt to manipulate choice strategy by using attribute-organized and alternative-organized information presentations (Bettman & Kakkar, 1977; Herstein, 1981). Both found that if information was "attribute salient," interdimensional processing was used; if information was "alternative salient," intradimensional processing was used.

Issue Salience

The salience of issues, although accepted as a critical component of the voting process, has "received remarkably little systematic attention" in political communication research (Rabinowitz, Prothro & Jacoby, 1982), and results have been conflicting. The majority of election studies have found images of candidates have the most influence on the voting decision (Campbell, Converse, Miller & Stokes, 1960; Norrander, 1986). For example, an analysis of American National Election Studies data on presidential elections from 1952 to 1984 found that perceptions of candidates generally focused on personality characteristics rather than issues (Miller, Wattenberg & Malanchuk, 1985), while research on voters in the 1980 presidential primary elections concluded that "assessments of the candidates' personal qualities" had more impact on the voting choice than "issue or ideological preference" (Marshall, 1983).

Other studies, however, have found issue salience to be an important predictor of voting behavior. Research on the 1964 and 1968 presidential elections found voters reported a number of salient issues, with the conclusion that "on the individual level, any issue singled out as personally most important plays a substantially greater role for those who so view it than it does for others. Moreover, the greater influence is sometimes dramatic" (Rabinowitz, Prothro & Jacoby, 1982). The authors claim that the importance of issues in voting decisions has been often overlooked, however, because an issue one person regards "as critically important may be ignored or viewed as trivial by another." Another study that examined influences on voters in the 1960 and 1964 presidential elections found that, after a candidate's image, "salient issues had almost as much weight as party identification in predicting voting choice" (RePass, 1971). An analysis of survey data from the 1980 presidential election found a significant relationship between individuals who reported high personal involvement in a particular issue and their voting choice, but not with people who reported relatively lower personal involvement in a particular issue (Young & Borgida, 1984).

To summarize, much research has examined attitudes towards both objects and attributes and behavior of the consumer or voter; less research has focused on information presentation, issue salience (or as usually referred to, importance) and decision making. Previous findings suggest that: (1) different models of decision making are used depending upon the situation or an individual's predisposition; (2) strategy choice may be "bounded" by attributes within individuals; (3) decision-making strategies exist along a continuum, rather than distinctly compensatory or non-compensatory; (4) altering the format of information may influence the decision strategy employed; and (5) the salience of issues may have some effect on voting behavior, though it may not be consistent across voters.

Accordingly, the following research hypotheses may now be stated:

> **Research Hypothesis One:** *Individuals presented with information about a political campaign in an issue-oriented (i.e., attribute-oriented) form are more likely to use a non-compensatory strategy in making a voting decision than individuals presented with a candidate-oriented form (i.e., alternative-oriented).*
>
> **Research Hypothesis Two:** *Individuals who report an issue as high in importance will be more likely to use a non-compensatory decision-making strategy than individuals who report that issue lower in importance.*

The relevant concepts have been defined as follows:

Information: Descriptions of the issues, candidates, and the candidates' stands on issues in a political campaign.

Attribute-oriented form: Presentation of information in a form that focuses on each issue, and provides all candidates' position on that issue.

Candidate-oriented form: Presentation of information in a form that focuses on each candidate, and also provides that candidate's position on each issue.

Decision: The end result of a four-stage model that includes problem recognition, defining the pool of alternatives, reviewing relevant information, and applying a decision rule (see Wright and Barbour, 1975).

Compensatory decision-making process: A decision strategy in which the voter bases his or her vote on an overall index of worth of the candidate's attributes.

Non-compensatory decision-making process: A decision strategy in which the voter bases his or her vote on less than all the information, choosing to focus instead on fewer attributes or even a single attribute.

Issue salience: The value and importance an individual places on an issue.

RESEARCH DESIGN

To best determine the decision-making strategies of the subjects, the experimental design contained three candidates and four issues. More information likely would have led to overload, and fewer candidates or issues would have made it more difficult to distinguish between compensatory or non-compensatory strategies. To ensure the information was relevant for subjects, an anonymous open-ended survey in an undergraduate communications course determined the four most salient issues: economy, education, health care and abortion, in that order. In the experiment, however, the issues received equivalent prominence.

The design involved a number of steps. First, a professional newspaper writer wrote two types of newspaper articles,[4] candidate-based and issue-based.[5] In the articles, a number of possible confounding variables (e.g., political party affiliation, gender bias and subject familiarity with candidates) were controlled. The fictitious candidates were male and were competing for the Democratic nomination in a Congressional District primary in a nearby state, a political sphere likely to be unknown among the subjects. With the exception of the story on abortion, the articles were given female bylines. For the story on abortion, the byline was non-gender specific. To avoid presenting subjects with too much information, for each issue two of the three candidates held the same position, with each candidate in disagreement once, except on the issue of abortion. On that issue, the three candidates held the following views: 1) anti-abortion; 2) politically pro-choice but personally anti-abortion; 3) politically and personally pro-choice.

To make certain a particular candidate or issue did not receive unequal prominence, the placement of candidates and issues were rotated within the articles.[6] Further, the articles were then randomized within their candidate-based or issue-based groupings.[7] After reading the articles, the subjects completed a questionnaire about their voting process.

MEASUREMENT

The questionnaire was designed to measure the decision-making strategy used and the importance individuals placed on issues in making a voting decision. Due to the difficulty of getting inside the "black box" of individuals' cognitive processes, a multi-measure approach was developed in an attempt to more thoroughly determine the decision-making model utilized.

First, operational definitions for each of the three major "decision-processing" strategies -- compensatory, conjunctive, and lexicographic -- were developed (see Wright & Barbour, 1975).[8] The operational definitions:

Compensatory: In making a voting choice, individuals weigh each candidates' stand on each issue in order to calculate which candidate, overall, is the best option. The decision is based on all of the information provided.

Conjunctive: In making a voting choice, individuals have certain minimum standards for candidates on issues considered important. In order to remain in consideration, a candidate has to meet these minimum standards; if a candidate fails to do so, he is eliminated. The voting decision is based on which candidate remains, or is the best among the remaining choices.

Lexicographic: In making a voting choice, individuals compare candidates on one issue considered most important. The candidate that comes closest to the subject's belief on that issue is the one chosen. If two candidates tie, their positions are compared on the next most-important issue, which functions as a tie-breaker.

For analysis, the latter two were combined into one non-compensatory category.

The structure of the questionnaire was designed to reduce the potential of reactivity. The initial question forced the subjects to make a decision by choosing a candidate. Questions then followed regarding the type of decision strategy used.

The first measure of the dependent variable, decision process, was a series of open-ended questions asking: (1) how subjects arrived at their candidate choice; (2) why subjects did not choose the other candidates; and (3) how subjects used the information provided. Data obtained in this measure were content analyzed, based on the operational definitions of decision-making.[9] Of the 81 respondents, three did not answer the questions. Of the remaining 78 subjects, two coders agreed on 66 as compensatory or non-compensatory, yielding an inter-coder reliability coefficient of .85. Using the formula for Scott's pi, which corrects for agreement by chance, intercoder reliability was determined to be 70 percent greater than by chance.[10] The remaining 12 responses were discussed by coders, and then classified.

The next component in the questionnaire was the second measure of the decision-making strategy, a closed-ended summary self-report question with an open-ended contingency. Subjects were asked to read descriptive statements about decision strategies and to then choose the statement that most closely resembled how they chose a candidate. The three statements closely mirrored the operational definitions of the compensatory, conjunctive and lexicographic models.

The final dependent measure contained nine dimensional statements corresponding to the decision-making models: three compensatory, two lexicographic, two conjunctive, and two combined lexicographic-conjunctive. These statements were designed to build a "decision strategy" index. Each statement was followed by a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." This measure addressed the possibility of mixed models or partial use of different models at different stages in decision processing.

Following data collection, factor analysis was performed on these statements, and two were eliminated after poor factor loadings prompted re-examination of their phrasing.[11] A forced one-factor solution was computed because previous research suggested a conceptualization of compensatory and non-compensatory decision strategies along a one-dimensional continuum. If so, compensatory and non-compensatory statements should have inverse loadings:

	Factor Loadings
1) How the candidates stood overall on the issues was more important to me than how they stood on a particular issue. (compensatory)	-.679
2) I compared candidates only on the issues that were important to me. (non-compensatory)	.555
3) I eliminated a candidate because we disagreed on an issue that was important to me. (non-compensatory)	.647
4) I used all the information provided to make my choice, looking at each candidate's stand on each issue. (compensatory)	-.606
5) I eliminated a candidate who did not meet certain set standards on an issue that was important to me. (non-compensatory)	.502
6) I looked for a candidate who agreed with me on the issue I thought was most important. The candidate who was closest to my position on that issue is the one I voted for. (non-compensatory)	.719
7) Using all the information, I weighed each candidate's stand on each issue before making my final choice. The candidate who seemed the best overall is the one I voted for. (compensatory)	-.679

Three compensatory items loaded strongly negatively, while four non-compensatory items loaded strongly positively, supporting the conceptualization of decision processing as one-dimensional. The factor analysis accounted for 39.8 percent of variance in the index, and achieved communalities ranging from .25 to .51. Factor scores produced from this solution were used to build a decision strategy index, the third measure of the dependent variable.[12] The index, with mean inter-item correlations of .295, had a Cronbach's alpha of .75.

The next part of the questionnaire focused on the importance of issues in the candidate choice. It was assumed that issue importance is a strong indicator of issue salience.[13] Subjects were asked to rate the importance on their voting decision of abortion, economy, education, and health care. For each issue, a five-point scale was used, ranging from "minimally important" to "extremely important." A "not at all important" choice was also available. Finally, subjects were asked a number of relevant demographic questions, including gender, age, and media usage.

RESULTS

The survey was administered to 85 students in undergraduate communications classes at a large midwestern university.[14] Most respondents took approximately 30 minutes to read the materials and complete the questionnaire. Of the 85 surveys conducted, four were not used in analysis: two subjects did not complete the survey, and two others were 16 years old and therefore not in the voting population. The remaining 81 surveys included 42 subjects who received issue-based articles and 39 who received candidate-based articles. Sixty-two percent of the subjects were women and 90 percent were between the ages of 18 and 25.

In the analysis of both hypotheses, the results were consistent across the three measures of the decision-making strategy, increasing confidence in the findings.

Tests of Hypothesis One

Hypothesis one, that subjects presented with issue-based articles would be more likely to use a non-compensatory decision-making model than subjects presented with candidate-based articles, was not supported. Across each of the three measures of the decision strategy used, no differences were found between the issue-based and candidate-based groups.

Tables of these findings are presented in the Appendix.

Tests of Hypothesis Two

The second hypothesis, that individuals who report an issue as high in importance will be more likely to use a non-compensatory decision-making strategy than individuals who report that issue lower in importance, produced findings that were more compelling. The reported importance of two issues, abortion and health care, was found to be significantly related to the decision-making strategies used; however, the issues were found to be inversely related to the strategy used.

Subjects who reported abortion as "extremely important" in their voting decision were significantly more likely to use a non-compensatory model than those who reported abortion as relatively less important. Inversely, subjects who reported health care as "extremely important" were significantly more likely to use a compensatory model than those who reported that issue as relatively less important. The reported importance of economy and education were not consistently found to be related to the decision-making model.

Therefore, partial support for the second hypothesis was found; the importance of abortion was significantly related to the use of a non-compensatory strategy, as predicted. However, the relationship between the importance of health care and a compensatory strategy was a reversal of what had been hypothesized. The different decision-making strategies used by individuals who reported abortion and health care as highly salient provide an intriguing area for discussion and speculation. This will be addressed in detail in the "Discussion and Conclusions" section.

To test the relationship between the four issues and each of the three measures of the decision process, the reported importance of abortion, economy, health care and education were recoded from their six-item scales into either "low importance" or "high importance." Subjects who rated an issue "extremely important" in their voting decision were placed in the high-importance category; the remainder of the subjects for each issue were placed in the low-importance category. The rationale for this split was that an "extremely important" issue would be likely to have a higher impact on a decision than an issue that is relatively less important.

Four t-tests, using the seven-statement index as the measure of the decision strategy, were run to compare the means of the low-importance and high-importance subjects on each issue. The results are presented in Table 1:

Table 1

Mean Decision Strategy Index Scores of Subjects
Who Reported Issues as Relatively Low or High in Importance
(Scale: Highly compensatory -1.99 to Highly non-compensatory 2.06)

	Index Scores			
Issue	**Low Importance**	**High Importance**	***t***	***p***
Abortion	-.29 (n=36)	.30 (n=41)	2.69	.009
Health care	.18 (n=52)	-.33 (n=24)	2.10	.039
Economy	-.01 (n=41)	.06 (n=36)	.30	.767
Education	.06 (n=54)	-.08 (n=23)	.57	.574

As Table 1 shows, subjects who reported abortion as higher in importance (i.e., "extremely important") in their voting decision were significantly more likely to use a *non-compensatory* decision-making model than individuals who rated abortion relatively lower in importance. Subjects who reported health care as higher in importance in their voting decision, however, were significantly more likely to use a *compensatory* decision-making model than individuals who rated health care relatively lower in importance. The reported importance of economy and education had no relation to the decision strategy used.

A second test of hypothesis two was conducted using the open-ended measure, which asked subjects to describe their decision-making process. Four crosstabs were run between the importance of each issue and the decision strategy. The results are presented in Table 2:

Table 2

Percentage of Subjects Reporting an Issue as Relatively High or Low in Importance Whose Open-ended Responses Indicated the Use of a Compensatory or Non-compensatory Decision-making Model

Model Used	Low Importance	High Importance
	Abortion	
Compensatory	77.1	32.5
Non-compensatory	22.9	67.5
Totals	100% (n=35)	100% (n=40)
	X^2=14.9, d.f.=1, p=.0001	
	Health Care	
Compensatory	44.0	70.8
Non-compensatory	56.0	29.2
Totals	100% (n=50)	100% (n=24)
	X^2=4.68, d.f.=1, p=.030	
	Economy	
Compensatory	57.9	48.6
Non-compensatory	42.1	51.4
Totals	100% (n=38)	100% (n=37)
	X^2=.644, d.f.=1, p=.422	
	Education	
Compensatory	46.2	69.6
Non-compensatory	53.8	30.4
Totals	100% (n=52)	100% (n=23)
	X^2=3.51, d.f.=1, p=.061	

The results shown in Table 2, using the open-ended responses as the measure of the decision strategy, are consistent with those shown in Table 1, in which the decision strategy index was the dependent variable.

The importance of abortion and health care in the voting decision were again significantly related to the decision strategy in an inverse manner. While the importance of economy had a negligible effect, subjects who reported education as "extremely important" in their voting decision were much more likely (p=.061) to use a compensatory decision-making model than subjects who rated education as relatively less important. This finding, though not supported in other tests of hypothesis two, suggested some similarity in the importance of health care and education. This potential relationship was further examined in the "Additional Analysis" section.

The closed-ended summary question, which provided subjects with descriptions of compensatory, conjunctive and lexicographic decision-making processes and then asked them to select which description best matched their procedure, was used for the final test of hypothesis two. In order to increase the number of subjects in each cell, the conjunctive and lexicographic summaries were combined into one broader non-compensatory category. Four crosstabs were run between the reported importance of each issue and the decision strategy reported in the summary question, and the results are presented in Table 3:

Table 3

Percentage of Subjects Reporting an Issue as Relatively High or Low in Importance Who Selected a Compensatory or Non-compensatory Decision-making Model for the Closed-ended Summary Question

Model Used	Low Importance	High Importance
	Abortion	
Compensatory	52.8	34.1
Non-compensatory	47.2	65.9
Totals	100% (n=36)	100% (n=41)
	X^2=2.72, d.f.=1, p=.099	
	Health Care	
Compensatory	38.5	54.2
Non-compensatory	61.5	45.8
Totals	100% (n=52)	100% (n=24)
	X^2=1.65, d.f.=1, p=.199	
	Economy	
Compensatory	46.3	38.9
Non-compensatory	53.7	61.1
Totals	100% (n=41)	100% (n=36)
	X^2=.435, d.f.=1, p=.510	
	Education	
Compensatory	44.4	39.1
Non-compensatory	55.6	60.9
Totals	100% (n=54)	100% (n=23)
	X^2=.186, d.f.=1, p=.666	

As Table 3 shows, the previously found directional relationships between reported importance of abortion and health care and type of decision-making strategy used were also supported with the closed-ended summary question; however, the statistical probabilities were not as high as with the other two dependent measures. The importance of economy and education were not significantly related to the use of either a compensatory or non-compensatory model.

Additional Analysis

Further analysis was conducted with two goals: 1) To determine whether the inverse relationships between the reported importance of abortion and health care with the decision-making strategy remained when information presentation was controlled; 2) To determine whether the importance of abortion, economy, education and health care in the voting decision were correlated.

To assess whether the reported importance of abortion and health care were significantly related to the decision strategy when information presentation (issue-based or candidate-based articles) was controlled, multiple regression was run with the decision strategy index as the dependent variable. The independent variables were dummy-coded (for abortion and health care, low importance=0, high importance=1). For the index, low was compensatory, high was non-compensatory. The independent variables were entered simultaneously, and the results are presented in Table 4:

Table 4

Relationship Between Reported Importance of Abortion and Health Care in a Voting Decision and Information Presentation in the Use of a Compensatory or Non-compensatory Decision-making Model

	Beta
Information Presentation	.07
Abortion Importance	.32**
Health Care Importance	-.25*
Adjusted R square	.12

*p<.05
**p<.01

Table 4 shows that, after information presentation was controlled, the reported importance of abortion remained significantly related to the use of a non-compensatory model, while the reported importance of health care was significantly related to the use of a compensatory model. As indicated by the beta weights, the importance of abortion was the strongest predictor of the decision strategy, followed by importance of health care. Also notable, the three variables accounted for 12 percent of the variance, as indicated by the adjusted R square.

To determine whether the reported importance of abortion, education, health care and economy in the voting decision were related, correlations were run using the original issue-importance scales.[15] The results are presented in Table 5:

Table 5

Correlations Between Reported Importance of Abortion, Education, Economy and Health Care in an Individual's Voting Decision

	Abortion	Economy	Education
Economy	-.16		
Education	-.07	.31*	
Health Care	-.10	.35**	.39**

*p<.01
**p<.001

As Table 5 shows, the reported importance of economy, education and health care were each significantly positively correlated, while importance of abortion was essentially uncorrelated with each of the other three issues. Subjects who reported abortion as important were likely to rate the other issues as slightly less important. These results lend further support to the directional differences between importance of abortion and health care and the type of decision-making models used.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The first research hypothesis, that individuals presented with attribute-oriented information would be more likely to use a non-compensatory decision-making model when voting than individuals presented with candidate-oriented information, was not supported. Information presentation was not significantly related to the decision-making strategies used by subjects.

It is possible, however, that information presentation was overpowered by the salience of issues in the voting decisions. Analysis of the second research hypothesis -- that individuals reporting issues high in importance would be more likely to use a non-compensatory decision-making process than individuals reporting issues lower in importance -- was partially supported. Subjects who reported abortion as "extremely important" in their decision were significantly more likely to use a non-compensatory decision-making strategy than individuals who rated abortion lower in importance. In contrast, subjects who reported health care as "extremely important" in their decision were significantly more likely to use a *compensatory* decision-making model than individuals who rated health care lower in importance. The reported importance of two other issues, education and economy, did not have significant relationships with the decision strategy.

Education and economy, however, were positively correlated ($p<.01$), and both were also positively correlated with the importance of health care ($p<.001$), indicating that individuals who reported health care as important in their voting decision were also likely to consider economy and education important. All three had slightly negative correlations with the importance of abortion, indicating that subjects who rated abortion high in importance in their decision were likely to consider education, economy and health care as a bit less important. These findings suggest, then, that individuals tended to make either a non-compensatory voting decision based heavily on the single issue of abortion or a compensatory voting decision that considered the three issues of health care, education, and economy together. Notably, these results support the conclusion of RePass (1971) that issue salience is a significant predictor of voting behavior, at least in terms of the decision strategy used by voters.

Personal Salience vs. General Salience

These findings suggest a possible difference in the nature of "importance" associated with different issues. The degree of importance of an issue may not be the sole determinant of decision strategy; rather, the type of importance engendered by different issues seems to be related to the decision process. It appears that of the four issues in this experiment, the type of importance attached to one differs substantially from the rest. More specifically, an issue such as abortion, that has high *personal salience*, seems to impact the decision-making process in a much different manner than issues with *general salience*, such as health care, economy and education, which are considered important but have less linkage to personal values.

Abortion, which is likely to be high in personal salience because of its close ties to personal morals or values, may lead individuals to make decisions based on only that one issue. It is certainly possible that health care, economy and education may be high in personal salience to some individuals in other situations, but as presented in this experiment with university undergraduates, they were most likely impersonal, policy-oriented issues, with little linkage to an individual's identity. These results are consistent with the assertion of Rabinowitz, Prothro and Jacoby (1982) that issues critically important to some individuals are not necessarily so for others.

To illustrate this possible relationship between issue salience and the types of decision-making strategy used, please see the attached "Decision-making Model" immediately following the text.

The data support the notion that "hammering home" an issue known to be personally salient to a target group may stimulate that group's decision to use that issue as a basis for voting. This research suggests abortion is such an issue. Other issues, such as gay rights, environmental policies or elderly benefits, might also be high in personal salience for different populations. If so, candidates may be well advised to address these type of issues, as President Clinton successfully did with abortion and gay rights in the recent presidential campaign. Conversely, the data also suggest that individuals who consider generally salient issues important tend to use a compensatory-based decision-making process. Such issues in politics may include foreign policy, infrastructure spending, and governmental reform. Candidates, then, who focus on a particular generally salient issue might be wise to also address other, similar issues.

It should be noted that issues themselves can be evaluated on the basis of different attributes by different individuals. That is, individual issues may have attributes that are personally salient and/or generally salient. For example, the issue of nuclear energy could be evaluated based on a number of attributes, such as cost efficiency, pollution emissions, energy needs, and so on. However, some individuals may tend to focus on one attribute of this issue, namely the threat of a nuclear incident. For these individuals, the other aspects of the issue can not compensate for this one highly salient attribute.

For both marketers and politicians, finding an issue or attribute high in personal salience could also mean a change in promotional strategies. Political or advertising campaigns focusing primarily on one or two issues with high personal salience would likely be easier to produce, less expensive, and, as suggested by these findings, possibly more successful if the electorate is divided in favor of the candidate's positions. Surveys of potential voters or consumers before or early in a campaign might identify personally salient or generally salient issues or attributes, and the political or advertising campaigns might approach the different types of issues in a wholly distinct manner. Future political and consumer research might examine differences in approach and success between campaigns that focus on personally salient issues and campaigns that focus on generally salient issues.

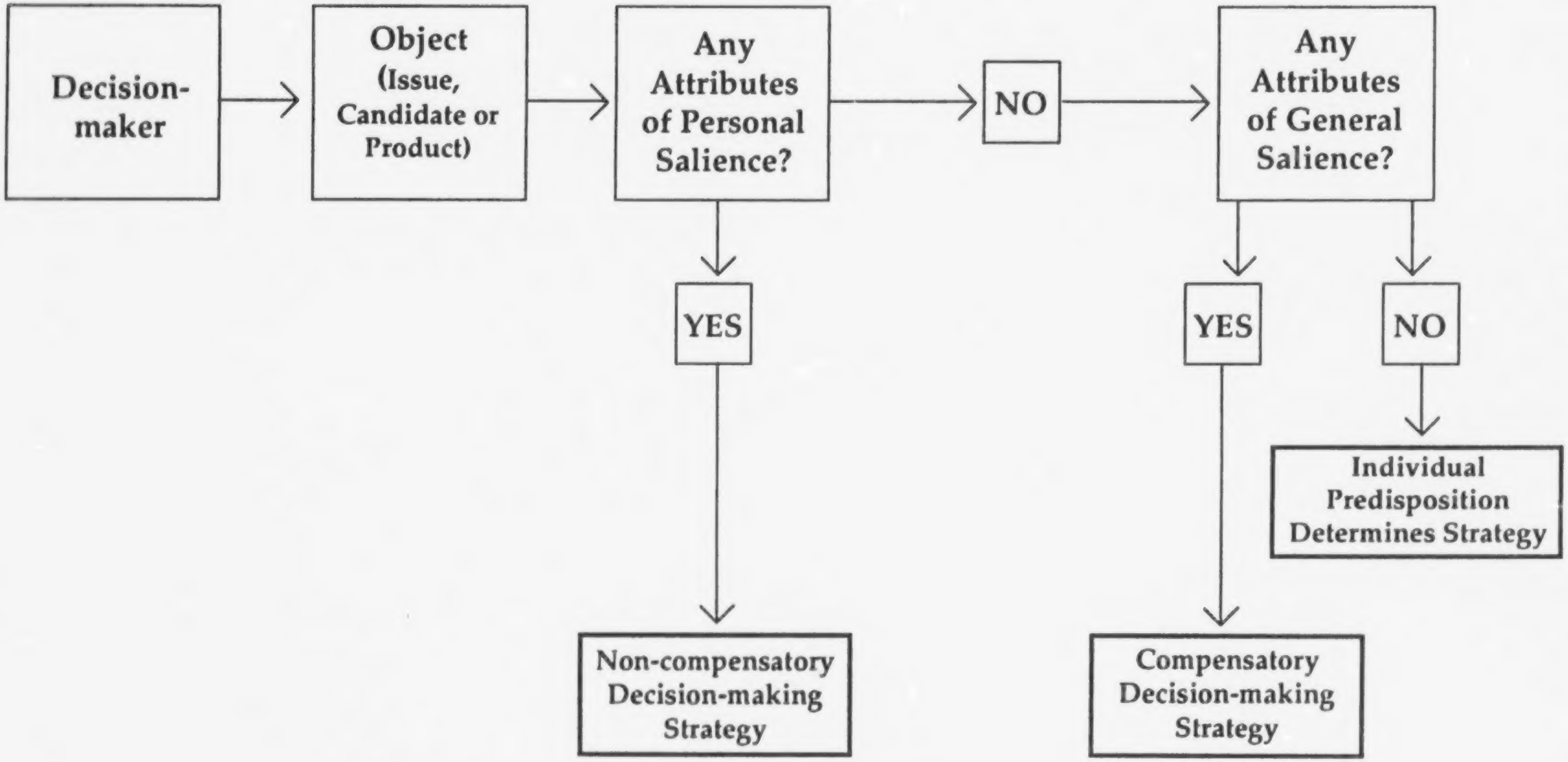

Figure 1
Decision-making Model

Decision-maker
Object (Issue, Candidate or Product)
Any Attributes of Personal Salience?
NO
Any Attributes of General Salience?
YES
YES
NO
Individual Predisposition Determines Strategy
Non-compensatory Decision-making Strategy
Compensatory Decision-making Strategy

Notes

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1. The authors contributed virtually equal effort to this paper. They also wish to note that this study was constructed and implemented within a graduate seminar on research design. The authors acknowledge that the implementation of this study reflects the contributions of all group members, particularly the labor of David Perlmutter, Nancy Nentl, Anthony Fung, and Sherrie Wilson, as well as the advice of professors Daniel Wackman and Albert Tims.

2. Researchers have examined how decision-makers create attitudes by deconstructing the attitude formation process. An attitude is said to have a structure that can be broken down into its component parts. One cognitive "attitude structure," borrowed from psychology and frequently used in marketing research, is the "expectancy-value" model (Bettman, 1979), where:

$$\text{Attitude} = \sum (\text{Expectancy} \times \text{Value})$$

The belief or subjective probability that an object possesses a certain attribute is "Expectancy." The second half of the model, "Value," is the importance a subject places on that attribute in a choice situation. Attitude is a function of the two. Psychologists (Fishbein & Raven, 1967) found strong correlation between attitudes (as measured by semantic differential surveys) and their summed expectancy-value products, leading them to believe that attitudes are derived from beliefs about the attributes of objects.

3. The word "alternative" means one of a set of choices, as dozens of "brands" may exist (Hayakawa 1978).

4. The writer of the articles has been a staff writer for the *Atlanta Journal & Constitution* and *Orange County Register*, in addition to four other papers.

5. These two types of articles were the key to the independent variable, information presentation, for the first hypothesis, but had no relation to the second hypothesis. Since the first hypothesis was not supported, the following information was moved into footnotes so as to condense the paper. Candidate-based articles, written for each of the three candidates, focused on personal characteristics of the candidate as well as the candidate's positions on the salient issues, following what has been the conventional format of American daily newspapers. Issue-based articles, written for each of the four issues, focused on the candidates' stances on the particular issue, beginning with brief background information on the issue followed by each candidate's position presented separately. Either candidate-based or issue-based newspaper articles were randomly assigned to experimental subjects.

6. In the candidate-based articles, economy, identified as the most salient issue in the anonymous survey, was the second issue presented in each story. The remaining three issues were rotated among the first, third and fourth positions. In the issue-based articles, the candidates' order was rotated for the issues of economy, education and health. On the issue of abortion, the "politically pro-choice but personally anti-abortion" candidate was presented first, followed by the "pro-abortion" candidate and the "anti-abortion" candidate, in that order, with each receiving equivalent space.

7. Because the articles were presented as newspaper clips in an election season, the articles appeared realistic. In addition, all of the candidates' positions were composites or variations of actual political stances, taken from several political campaigns.

8. Wright and Barbour also suggest a fourth decision-processing strategy, affect-referral. In this strategy, an individual makes a decision based primarily on an affective feeling about the various objects or attributes, of which he or she has previous information. In this research, subjects were unfamiliar with the candidates' stands on the four issues, while other possible affect-referral

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attributes were randomized or controlled (i.e., party affiliation, age, education, gender). For this experiment, then, the possibility of affect referral was minimized.

9. Responses were coded as compensatory if three or more issues were mentioned as salient in the candidate choice; if any subject indicated that a candidate was eliminated due to his stand on an issue deemed salient, however, then that subject was coded as non-compensatory. Subjects were also coded as non-compensatory if only one issue was mentioned as salient in the decision-making process. In the few cases where none of these responses were present (e.g., two issues mentioned as salient and no candidate was eliminated), the responses were carefully analyzed to determine if greater weight was placed on one particular issue. If so, the subject was coded as non-compensatory.

10. The coefficient of inter-coder agreement was determined by taking the number of coding decisions agreed upon and dividing it by the total number of coding decisions made. The formula for computing Scott's pi is percent observed agreement minus percent expected agreement, divided by one minus the percent expected agreement. See Scott (1955).

11. One statement ("I agreed with two candidates on an issue I thought was important, so I looked at a second issue to choose between them"), in addition to its low factor loading (.329), was problematic because many subjects who might have utilized a non-compensatory decision model never agreed with two candidates on an issue. This statement assumes that this will occur. The other statement ("I voted for a candidate because, on all issues I considered important, he met my minimum standards"), in addition to its low factor loading (.039), is not clearly compensatory or non-compensatory. It is possible a subject could have considered all issues as important.

12. These standardized factor scores appropriately weighted the contribution of individual items to the index. An additive index, in contrast, assumes each item contributes equally to the index.

13. As conceptually defined, issue salience is the importance *and* value an individual places on a particular issue. For this research, the importance of issues was directly measured while the value was inferred, based on the perceived relevance of the issues to the experimental subjects (all college undergraduates), 90 percent of whom were between the ages of 18 and 25.

14. Neither class used for the final experiment was surveyed earlier to determine the salient issues.

15. One of the research questions was whether "personal" issues, such as abortion, would impact the voting decision process differently than "policy" issues, such as health care, economy and education. Tests of hypothesis two indicated that, indeed, abortion and health care did affect the decision strategy differently. The second test of hypothesis two also indicated that the importance of education had a near-significant relationship with the type of model subjects described using in the open-ended question. Although this relationship was not supported in the other tests of hypothesis two, further examination was thought to be warranted to determine if the three policy issues were positively correlated while abortion was not.

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Appendix: Tests of Hypothesis One

Table 6
Mean Scores on the Decision Strategy Index of Subjects Who Received Candidate-based and Issue-based Articles (Scale: Highly compensatory -1.99 to highly non-compensatory 2.06)

	Candidate-based (n=38)	Issue-based (n=42)	t	p
Index	.03	-.01	.20	.839

Table 7
Percentage of Subjects in Candidate-based and Issue-based Groups Whose Open-ended Responses Indicated the Use of a Compensatory or Non-compensatory Decision-making Model

	Information Presentation	
	Candidate-based (n=37)	Issue-based (n=41)
Model Used		
Compensatory	59.5	46.3
Non-compensatory	40.5	53.7
Totals	100%	100%

X^2=1.34, d.f.=1, p=.247

Table 8
Percentage of Subjects in Candidate-based and Issue-based Groups Who Selected a Compensatory or Non-compensatory Decision-making Model for the Closed-ended Summary Question

	Information Presentation	
	Candidate-based (n=39)	Issue-based (n=41)
Model Used		
Compensatory	43.6	46.3
Non-compensatory	56.4	53.7
Totals	100%	100%

X^2=.06, d.f.=1, p=.805

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PRINT MEDIA USE AND PERCEIVED CREDIBILITY AMONG SENIOR CONGRESSIONAL STAFF

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A paper presented at the 1993 AEJMC Newspaper Division session, "Reading, Liking and Dropping the Paper: Factors Affecting Readership." Saturday, August 14, 1993, Kansas City, Missouri.

PRINT MEDIA USE AND PERCEIVED CREDIBILITY AMONG SENIOR CONGRESSIONAL STAFF

The traditional news value of prominence attests to popular interest in elite behavior. Furthermore, scholars have shown interest in elites' media behavior. Weiss, for example, surveyed American leaders in several fields to learn the magazines and newspapers they read.[1]

With respect to media behavior, an elite population that often has been overlooked is congressional staff. However, congressional staff serve an important role in assisting members of Congress in the execution of their official duties, including the processing of the reams of information received from numerous sources, among them mass publications. And changes in Congress as an institution have increased the number and importance of staff members.[2]

Congressional staff use the print media for purposes of surveillance. They employ published materials to remain informed about current events and political developments.[3] They also assess public opinion from the news stories, columns, editorials, and letters to the editor in these sources.[4]

This study examines the print media use of senior congressional staff, as well as staff members' perceptions of the credibility of several publications. Much of the research related to media use and credibility has focused on a general audience and at the level of type of medium.[5] This study, however, makes individual publications the level of analysis and focuses on the media behavior of a special population.

In order to discover the publication preferences and related credibility perceptions of this specialized population, a sample of senior congressional staff was surveyed by questionnaire. One objective of the survey was to document the frequency of use of several major newspapers, magazines, and opinion journals. Another objective was to assess the level of credibility attributed to the publications. Responses were examined in light of three primary staff characteristics: staff position, political party affiliation, and congressional body in which one works.

To best understand the importance of knowing congressional staff media preferences, a brief review of the staff function and the research findings of print media in Congress follows. This paper then highlights media use and credibility research findings. The hypotheses and method of conducting this study are discussed. Then the results are presented, followed by a discussion of the findings.

CONGRESSIONAL STAFF FUNCTION

There are two primary categories of congressional staff: committee and personal. The ratio of personal to committee staff in both houses of the U.S. Congress is about three to one.[6] While many personal staffers handle constituent-related duties (casework, requests, correspondence, etc.), staff increases over the past few decades and the expanding jurisdictions of the federal government have also meant that more personal staffers, especially senior staff, devote increasing efforts to tracking legislation and assisting members in legislative activity.[7] Vogler and Waldman noted the finding in a study done for the House Commission on

Administrative Review "that personal staff was the single most frequently used source of voting cues [by members]."[8]

Although every congressional office arranges its staff differently, certain aspects of staff positions remain generally consistent across Capitol Hill.[9] The Senate Republican Policy Committee categorized staff positions under four areas: legislative, press, administrative, and state office.[10]

This study is concerned with the top three staffers in congressional members' Washington offices because of the key roles they fulfill, each heading the three areas of responsibility listed above except for the state office. Their information needs and sources may differ according to position.

Usually overseeing the personal office is the administrative assistant (AA), who may be called chief of staff. The AA is responsible for overall office operations and generally serves as chief political advisor. The legislative director (LD) is usually the person who coordinates a member's legislative activities. The LD manages the legislative staff—a number of legislative assistants—and assists in developing the member's legislative program. The press secretary (PS), sometimes called communications director, is responsible for the member's interaction with the news media and for coordination of publicity activities. These three staff members comprise the core of staff advisors to members of Congress.[12]

PRINT MEDIA SOURCES ON CAPITOL HILL

In government, the news media are recognized as helping to set the legislative agenda and giving significance to certain issues. They have a key role in placing issues within the framework by which policymakers and the public understand the topics.[13]

While many publications vie for the attention of congressional members and their staffs, researchers have found a number of media sources that have been named by members and staff as useful in their efforts to remain informed about political and policy developments, as well as to learn of emerging issues and public opinion. Ornstein wrote: "Like the rest of us, [members of Congress] get most of their news and impressions of people and politics from the mass media: the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Wall Street Journal*, and the networks."[14] These three newspapers seem to be the most preferred on Capitol Hill. It should be noted, however, that Washington has a relatively new competing newspaper, the *Washington Times*. Members told Weiss that they read the major news magazines, such as *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *U.S. News and World Report*, but reported less frequent reading of the political opinion magazines, such as *New Republic*, *The Nation*, and *National Review*.[15] Fox and Hammond confirmed the importance of the above named newspapers and magazines as information sources for congressional staff, as well as such specialized publications as *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report* and *National Journal*.[16]

PREVIOUS MEDIA USE AND CREDIBILITY RESEARCH

Mass media are used to gain knowledge and have been found effective at providing that knowledge, especially print media. Palmgreen examined the effect of media use on political learning, finding that media exposure most strongly predicted learning about national political problems. This finding held even after controlling for other variables.[17] Among types of media, Hendrickson reported that newspaper reliance results in more comprehensive knowledge and a better understanding of international affairs among readers, in contrast to television-reliant viewers.[18] Similarly, Bogart found general audience respondents to favor newspapers as the "best" source—over television, radio, and magazines—to learn about nearly three of every five news topics.[19] Berkowitz and Pritchard examined political knowledge and various communication resources, including the news media, interpersonal communication, and campaign-generated information. They found newspapers to be the only communication resource "consistently related to political knowledge."[20]

Studying the uses and gratifications motives of magazine reading, Payne, Severn, and Dozier concluded that the content of a medium can predict the uses of specific types of media. They linked interaction, surveillance, and diversion motives to trade magazine usage.[21] On Capitol Hill, newspapers, news and business magazines, and opinion journals, as well as periodicals such as *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report*, may be regarded as "trade" publications for those people involved in policymaking.[22] Thus, congressional staff would have uses and gratifications motives for print media usage.

Graber said that media use depends on the context in which usage takes place.[23] McLeod and McDonald found evidence that those who purposefully read newspapers for public affairs content exhibit high levels of political participation and economic knowledge.[24] Drew and Weaver examined media attention and media exposure for their possible effects, discovering that people interested in national issues were not necessarily interested in local issues, and vice versa. They reported that media audience members paid attention to relevant information, regardless of the medium delivering it.[25] However, the case can be made that congressional staff have so much written material at hand in the workplace that they find print media more useful and readily available as related to their job duties, thus providing the context for media usage.

With respect to media credibility, research indicates that media audiences believe specific news sources to be more credible. Sargent found that personal news sources (i.e., named reporters) received higher ratings on ethical factors—accurate, sincere, responsible, and impartial—than impersonal sources (i.e., *New York Times*, NBC-TV).[26] Graber found that subjects generally believed specific reporters or media except when a report directly contradicted personal experience. Complaints usually centered around exaggeration and a wrong emphasis.[27]

Also, audience members' predispositions affect their views of news media credibility. Gunther and Lasorda correlated respondents' ratings of their personal interest in four political issues with their ratings of trust in newspaper content regarding those issues. They learned that as issue importance increased, respondents trusted issue-related information in newspapers more; however, the researchers surmised that at the upper end of issue importance, highly partisan readers may trust the media less on that issue.[28] Gunther pursued his investigation of attitude extremity and trust in media, finding trust in newspapers to be highest among the politically neutral and lowest for partisans.[29] Mason and Nass reported that readers who are more strongly favorable toward the target of a "mudslinging" newspaper article are likely to view the newspaper as biased against the target, basing their interpretation upon their previously held disposition toward the target of a "cheap shot" being reported in the newspaper.[30]

In an effort to learn the characteristics of people who perceive the media as less credible, Gaziano and McGrath identified two personality types: "less well informed and suspicious" and "sophisticated skeptics." The latter group is more likely to be found on Capitol Hill than the former. "Sophisticated skeptics" have higher education and income levels, have greater knowledge of and personal experience with news media, are very critical of the news media and likely to act on media affronts, and are generally Republican and conservative.[31] Taken with Graber's finding that people take issue with the media when a report conflicts with their personal experience and with research showing the influence of audience predispositions, Gaziano and McGrath's characterization of media critics indicates active audience members whose involvement in public affairs tempers their perceptions of the credibility of specific news media. Audience sophistication and partisan predispositions also would affect credibility perceptions of specific publications, the level of analysis in this study.[32]

It is hoped that this study will complement research like Weiss's survey of American leaders and extend the line of media use and credibility research by examining a single type of medium. This study should aid in understanding the publication preferences of members of a partisan specialized population using print media as sources of specific types of information and for job-related purposes.

HYPOTHESES

Two general hypotheses were tested in this study. One concerns media use, and the other relates to media credibility.

H_1: Congressional staff differ in publication usage in terms of political party affiliation, staff position, and House/Senate service.

H_2: Congressional staff differ in perceptions of publication credibility in terms of political party affiliation, staff position, and House/Senate service.

The data were expected to indicate that Republican and Democratic staff differ in their media behavior to some degree in publications used and more so in terms of their credibility ratings. This expectation was based on the fact that congressional staffers have strong political party affiliations[33] and the generally accepted assumption that Democrats tend to be more liberal ideologically and Republicans more conservative. Thus, although both parties were likely to read some of the same publications, their perspectives regarding those sources' credibility would likely vary systematically, in keeping with the findings of Gunther, Graber, Gaziano, and others discussed above.

It was also expected that the media behavior of top staffers (AAs, LDs, and PSs) would differ as a function of job duties and consequently the information needs of people in those three positions.

House and Senate staffers were expected to differ in media behavior because of the two-year vs. six-year terms of their bosses, placing vastly different election time frames under which they respectively work. Also, representatives tend toward more provincial perspectives because they represent districts rather than states, which senators represent. It was expected that these factors would bear upon publication preferences and perhaps perceptions of publication credibility.

METHOD

Questionnaires were personally delivered to a sample of 535 senior congressional aides (a staffer in one of the top three positions in each House and Senate office) in November 1991. A letter on University of Tennessee School of Journalism letterhead introduced the survey to respondents. The questionnaires were accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope for return by mail.[34]

A random start, systematic sampling technique was applied to alphabetical lists of House and Senate members taken from the Spring 1991 U.S. House of

Representatives and the July 1991 U.S. Senate telephone directories (the most recent ones). This method yielded a sample of one senior aide in each office.

A master list of room numbers was made for each of the six House and Senate office buildings and included the job title of the sample subject, along with a control number that corresponded to a number on the return envelope. The control numbers allowed checking off the list once the questionnaire was returned. This procedure guided follow-up delivery of a second round of questionnaires to nonrespondents in December 1991.

The first 535 questionnaires delivered resulted in 152 completed and returned surveys, a 28.4% response rate. The follow-up delivery yielded forty-eight additional surveys returned, increasing the total response rate to 37.4%.[35] Although this was a relatively low response rate, it fell within the range of responses reported in the literature.[36] The response in this study was considered acceptable for the extremely busy, specialized population being examined.

Media Use Measurement. The questionnaire was divided into three sections, the first dealing with publication usage. "Recognition" type measures similar to Weiss's were employed, with respondents being asked about how often they read each publication. Respondents indicated frequency of use on a 5-point scale ("never" = 1, "read every issue" = 5). Checklists of six newspapers, twelve magazines, and six opinion journals were given, the publications named having been validated by pretest.[37] A place was given in each list for respondents to name and rate additional publications. Following each publication list, a derivative of the

Roper question was posed.[38] Respondents were asked to indicate which one publication from each list they would choose if they could read only one.

Media Credibility Measurement. The three lists appeared again in the next section for respondents to rate each publication on 5-point scales, each scale measuring Rimmer and Weaver's four attributes of media credibility: bias, completeness, accuracy, and trustworthiness.[39] The negative characteristics of each attribute were all put at the low end of the scale and the positive attributes at the upper end, which allowed the construction of a credibility index for each publication. Respondents were instructed to skip any publication with which they did not feel familiar enough to rate.

After respondents rated the publications in each list on all four credibility attributes, they were asked a forced-choice believability question.[40] This also was a form of the Roper question, asking if respondents received conflicting reports from these sources, which one publication would they be most inclined to believe?

Personal Data. The final section of the questionnaire asked for demographic and political information, including staff position, congressional body worked for, ideology ("very liberal" = 1, "very conservative" = 7), and political party affiliation.

The 200 respondents resembled fairly well the original sample in terms of the three key variables. The original sample included 19% from the Senate and 81% from the House. The actual response was 80.5% from the House, 14.5% from the Senate, and 5% who did not indicate the body of Congress. For political party, the original sample contained 61% Democrats and 39% Republicans. The actual response yielded 50% Democrats, 39.5% Republicans, 7% Independents, and 3.5% giving no indication. By staff position, the sample originally drawn included a third in each position. The actual response was 29.5% from AAs, 23% from LDs, and 43% from PSs. Thus, two of the top positions were underrepresented somewhat and the press position overrepresented among respondents. Almost 5% of respondents did not indicate their job title.

Regarding ideology, a significant difference was found for political parties, as was expected (p < .0001). Republicans rated themselves as more conservative (M = 5), while Democrats considered themselves to be more liberal (M = 3). No statistical difference was found for the ideology measure between House (M = 3.99) and Senate (M = 4.29) or in terms of staff position (AA M = 3.97; LD M = 3.98; PS M = 4.06).

Pearson correlation coefficients indicated no significant collinearity problems among any of the three key variables.

RESULTS

Media Use. Table 1 gives the results of significance tests of means (t-tests) by political party for frequency of newspaper use. Democrats read the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* significantly more frequently than Republicans, although Republicans read the *Post* very often. On the other hand, GOP aides read the *Wall Street Journal* and the *Washington Times* to a significantly greater degree than Democratic staff. Cross-tabulation of the forced-choice responses indicated the *Post* to be the primary newspaper choice among both parties, followed by the *New York Times* for Democrats and the *Wall Street Journal* for Republicans.

Table 1 about here

As a function of congressional body, only one significant difference was found in the means of newspaper frequency of use. Senate staff (n = 28) read the *New York Times* more frequently than House staff (n = 160)(S M = 3.69, SD = 1.04; HR M = 3.22, SD = 1.21; p < .05). Aides in both bodies reported reading the *Washington Post* (S M = 4.76, SD = 0.79; HR M = 4.76, SD = 0.71; N.S.) most frequently, followed by the *Wall Street Journal* and the *New York Times.*

By position, PSs (n = 85) reported reading all six newspapers more frequently than AAs (n = 59) or LDs (n = 45). Multiple t-tests yielded significant results between the mean frequency of newspaper use of PSs and the other two positions for the *Christian Science Monitor* (AA M = 1.98, SD = 0.99; LD M = 1.93, SD = 1.09; PS M = 2.48, SD = 1.20; LD/PS p < .05; AA/PS p < .05), *New York Times* (AA M = 3.17, SD = 1.26; LD M = 2.70, SD = 1.19; PS M = 3.69, SD = 1.02; LD/PS p < .0001; AA/PS p < .05), and *USA Today* (AA M = 2.05, SD = 1.06; LD M = 1.86, SD = 1.03; PS M = 2.65, SD = 0.91; LD/PS p < .0001; AA/PS p < .005). All three positions read the *Washington Post* (AA M = 4.69, SD = 0.82; LD M = 4.61, SD = 0.98; PS M = 4.89, SD = 0.41; N.S.) most often, with this result supported in the forced-choice responses.

The frequency of reading magazines varied as a function of political party and position more than by service in the House or Senate. Staff in both parties read *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report* most frequently, with no statistically significant difference (see Table 2). Significant differences occurred for *Time* and *Newsweek*, read more frequently by Democrats, and *U.S. News and World Report*, which Republicans read more often. Responses to the forced-choice question reflected this same order of magazine preference by party.

Table 2 about here

While respondents in all three senior staff positions read *CQ Weekly Report* most frequently, AAs (n = 59) and LDs (n = 45) relied on it significantly more often than did PSs (n = 85)(AA M = 4.48, SD = 0.80; LD M = 4.69, SD = 0.56; PS M = 3.98, SD = 1.19; LD/PS $p < .0001$; AA/PS $p < .005$). Generally, AAs and PSs seemed to read other magazines more than did LDs. This was the case with the three principal newsweeklies, *U.S. News* (AA M = 3.22, SD = 1.24; LD M = 2.84, SD = 1.17; PS M = 3.65, SD = 1.00; AA/LD N.S.; LD/PS $p < .0005$; AA/PS N.S.), *Time* (AA M = 3.67, SD = 1.15; LD M = 3.33, SD = 1.33; PS M = 3.82, SD = 0.97; AA/LD N.S.; LD/PS $p < .05$; AA/PS N.S.), and *Newsweek* (AA M = 3.75, SD = 1.23; LD M = 3.30, SD = 1.25; PS M = 3.91, SD = 0.96; AA/LD $p < .05$; LD/PS $p < .005$; AA/PS N.S.). *National Journal* was read about as frequently as these magazines (AA M = 3.70, SD = 1.38; LD M = 3.25, SD = 1.48; PS M = 3.38, SD = 1.28; N.S.), with all other magazines listed read much less frequently. Cross-tabulation of forced-choice responses by position generally supported the above order of magazine preference.

As a function of congressional body, frequency of magazine use differed little. However, the most often read publication, *CQ Weekly Report*, significantly differed between House and Senate (S M = 3.96, HR M = 4.39, d.f. = 169, $p < .03$); no other pair of means was significantly different. *Congressional Quarterly* was followed by *Newsweek* and *U.S. News* for both houses in order of usage.

Opinion journal usage differed significantly by political party, but not as a function of congressional body or staff position. Aside from *Commentary*, the difference in mean frequency of use was statistically significant for the five other opinion journals (see Table 3). Overall opinion journal reading appeared less frequent than that of the most preferred newspapers and magazines. Also, the findings here were in general accord with the ideological perspectives of the publications, although Republicans reported reading *New Republic* more than any other journal except *National Review*. And Democrats on the average read *National Review* more often than other opinion journals except *New Republic*. Analysis by cross-tabulation and nonparametric statistics, while somewhat tenuous, generally supported these results.

Table 3 about here

Opinion journal usage differences as a function of congressional body or staff position were nonsignificant, save one. In light of both variables, respondents reported reading *New Republic* (HR M = 2.69, SD = 1.30, S M = 2.66, SD = 1.37, N.S.; AA M = 2.64, SD = 1.31, LD M = 2.64, SD = 1.33, PS M = 2.77, SD = 1.32, N.S.) most frequently, followed by *National Review* (HR M = 2.44, SD = 1.28, S M = 2.45, SD = 1.21, N.S.; AA M = 2.37, SD = 1.20, LD M = 2.16, S D = 1.31, PS M = 2.60, SD = 1.25, N.S.). The one significant difference occurred between LDs and PSs for reading *Progressive* (LD M = 1.18, SD = 0.45; PS M = 1.41, SD = 0.73; LD/PS p < .04). In the forced-choice responses, respondents selected *New Republic* most frequently, closely followed by *National Review*, both by congressional house and staff position.

Media Credibility. Table 4 shows the mean differences in credibility ratings of newspapers by party. Republicans rated the *Wall Street Journal* most highly among newspapers, while Democrats gave the *New York Times* the highest rating. Democrats rated the conservative *Washington Times* the lowest in credibility terms, while Republicans rated it higher than the liberal *Washington Post*, which received the lowest GOP credibility rating. In the forced-choice measure, Democrats chose to believe the *New York Times*, while Republicans believed the *Wall Street Journal*.

Table 4 about here

Position on staff had little influence on newspaper credibility perceptions. One significant difference was found in the credibility index, constructed by adding the mean ratings of the four credibility components for a publication, of the *Washington Times* between PSs and AAs. The *Times* had a mean index of 9.79 from PSs and of 8.39 from AAs (d.f. = 117, p < .03). The credibility components in which PS ratings were significantly higher for this newspaper were accuracy and trustworthiness. Also, PSs rated the *Wall Street Journal* (PS M = 4.17, AA M = 3.86, d.f. = 122, p < .02), the *Washington Post* (PS M = 3.84, AA M = 3.46, d.f. = 123, p < .02), and the *New York Times* (PS M = 4.13, AA M = 3.86, d.f. = 120, p < .04) significantly higher on accuracy than did AAs. Press secretaries significantly differed with LDs on accuracy ratings of the *New York Times* (PS M = 4.13, LD M = 3.71, d.f. = 65, p < .03) and the *Washington Post* (PS M = 3.84, LD M = 3.37, d.f. = 67, p < .04).

No significant differences occurred between houses of Congress in newspaper ratings or in frequency distributions with respect to credibility.

Regarding magazine credibility ratings by party, both parties rated *CQ Weekly Report* the highest, with no statistical difference between group means (see Table 5). *National Journal*, which received the second-highest rating from both parties, differed significantly between its mean ratings. Republicans rated *Forbes*, *Fortune*, and *Insight* significantly more highly than did Democrats, while Democrats indicated higher credibility perceptions for *Atlantic Monthly*, *Newsweek*, and *Time*.

Table 5 about here

Just two credibility indices had significantly different means with respect to House and Senate: *Congressional Quarterly* and *Fortune*. House staffers assigned *CQ Weekly Report* a mean credibility index of 18.62; Senate staff rated it 17.68 (d.f. = 143, p < .04), occurring from a difference in trustworthiness ratings. This remained the highest rated magazine, however. *Fortune* received a mean rating of 13.21 from the House and 12.00 from the Senate (d.f. = 36, p < .01).

Staff position made little difference for magazine credibility. The majority of respondents in each position reported being most inclined to believe *CQ Weekly Report*. Only a few differences were found in magazine credibility component ratings, mostly on trustworthiness, PSs generally assigning higher ratings than AAs.

Regarding opinion journal credibility, political party once again was the most fruitful of the independent correlates. See Table 6. While *New Republic* earned a high index rating from both sides of the aisle, from there on, partisanship prevailed. Republicans rated the conservative *Human Events* and *National Review* significantly more highly than did Democrats, while Democrats gave significantly higher ratings to the liberal *Nation* and *Progressive*. The ratings of *Commentary*, while generally in the right ideological direction, represented little significance in differences. Nearly all credibility ratings by party, whether statistically significant or not, went in the expected ideological direction.

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Table 6 about here

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Position on staff yielded a few statistically significant differences with respect to opinion journal credibility, primarily between AAs and PSs. In every case, PSs gave publications the higher rating, while AAs and LDs tended to assign similar ratings. The most notable difference occurred in the *Human Events* credibility index (PS M = 10.23, AA M = 8.23, d.f. = 68, $p < .03$). Generally where differences were found, PSs rated opinion journals more highly than AAs on completeness.

Only one significant difference occurred regarding congressional body. *Human Events*, in terms of accuracy, received a House rating of 2.79; it received a 2.17 Senate rating (d.f. = 96, $p < .03$).

DISCUSSION

The two general hypotheses tested in this study were partially supported. Regarding the first—that congressional staff differ in publication use by political party, congressional house, and staff position—several conclusions may be drawn.

First, the most significant of the three variables was political party. Publication use as a function of party resulted in fourteen statistically significant t-tests out of twenty-four total t-tests. The publications most read by members of each party tended to differ in accordance with ideological perspectives generally attributed to those publications, beyond the publications most frequently read in the newspaper and magazine categories. Thus, the *Washington Post* was cited by both parties as the most frequently read newspaper, giving support to previous findings that the *Post* is the paper of Washington officialdom. Second choices exhibited the ideological differences: the *Wall Street Journal* for Republican staff and the *New York Times* for Democrats. Besides *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report*, which provides useful political and legislative information to all, second choices of magazines also reflected differences by party—Republicans chose *U.S. News and World Report*, Democrats chose *Newsweek*. And as expected, the same influence held sway for opinion journal usage; Republicans most frequently read *National Review*, Democrats the *New Republic*.

Second, position on staff had some, although limited, significance regarding frequency of publication use. Press secretaries reported reading more publications more frequently than those in the other two positions. Legislative directors appeared to read the least of the three positions. This finding suggests that PSs need to survey the environment beyond Congress, LDs seek more specific, policy-related information, and AAs, whose reading preferences indicated a mixture of contents, generally fell between the other two senior staffers in print media usage.

Third, the house of Congress had little correlational value regarding publication usage. House and Senate staff seemed to have about the same publication preferences.

The second hypothesis—that congressional staff would differ in perceptions of publication credibility in terms of political party, congressional body, and staff position—was supported along the same general lines as the media use hypothesis and lacked support in the same areas as above.

As a function of party affiliation, the newspapers and magazines read most often were not necessarily those regarded as most credible. While both parties read the *Washington Post* the most, Republicans rated their second most frequently read newspaper, the *Wall Street Journal*, as the most credible newspaper. Democrats treated their second-choice newspaper under usage, the *New York Times*, the same way—they rated it the most credible newspaper.

Because both parties gave *CQ Weekly Report* and next *National Journal* the highest credibility ratings of magazines, these publications perhaps should be placed in a category of their own. The most distinct differences in magazine ratings by party occurred with respect to *Newsweek*, *Time*, and *Insight*. Party was also a significant correlate of opinion journal credibility ratings, generally occurring in the expected ideological directions. However, *New Republic* received from Republicans the second highest rating on credibility of opinion journals.

Concerning staff position, PSs tended to rate publications as more credible than did those in the other two positions. This may be explained by the fact that PSs often have worked in the news media and thus trust the product of their former colleagues, while LDs and AAs have more direct knowledge of legislative and policy matters, thus knowing when the press gets it wrong.

Congressional body was, once again, an almost insignificant independent variable regarding publication credibility ratings.

In conclusion, the findings of this study support the work of Weiss and others with respect to specific publication usage. This study also couples usage and credibility perceptions, an important link to be made in the advancement of media research. While these findings may hold for the specialized population of congressional staff, the media use and credibility perceptions of a general audience should be linked in a similar manner in future endeavors.

ENDNOTES

[1] C. H. Weiss, "What America's Leaders Read," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 38:1-22 (1974).

[2] M. J. Malbin, "Delegation, Deliberation, and the New Role of Congressional Staff," in T. E. Mann and N. J. Ornstein, eds., *The New Congress* (Washington, D. C.: American Enterprise Institute, 1981), 134-177; N. J. Ornstein, "The House and the Senate in a New Congress," in Mann and Ornstein, eds., *The New Congress*, 363-383; J. A. Wettergreen, "Bureaucratizing the American Government," in G. S. Jones and J. A. Marini, eds., *The Imperial Congress: Crisis in the Separation of Powers* (New York: Pharos, 1988), 68-102.

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Table 1

Frequency of Use of Newspapers As a Function of Political Party*

	Democrat N=99		Republican N=77		
Newspapers	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	p
Christian Science Monitor	2.15	1.08	1.95	1.04	N.S.
New York Times	3.57	1.10	2.87	1.19	.0001
USA Today	2.26	1.10	2.26	1.01	N.S.
Wall Street Journal	3.23	1.15	3.81	1.04	.0001
Washington Post	4.87	0.51	4.59	0.95	.05
Washington Times	2.19	1.11	3.69	1.18	.0001

* 1=Never Read, 5=Read Every Issue

Table 2

Frequency of Use of Magazines As a Function of Political Party*

	Democrat N=99		Republican N=78		
Magazines	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	p
Atlantic Monthly	1.90	1.14	1.42	0.66	.0005
Business Week	2.36	1.10	2.33	1.00	N.S.
Congressional Qtly.	4.33	0.92	4.27	1.01	N.S.
Forbes	2.06	1.03	2.18	1.09	N.S.
Fortune	2.02	1.04	2.09	1.01	N.S.
Insight	1.56	0.86	2.23	1.16	.0001
National Journal	3.57	1.32	3.26	1.42	N.S.
New Dimensions	1.15	0.54	1.27	0.62	N.S.
Newsweek	3.93	1.05	3.47	1.22	.01
The Economist	2.18	1.11	2.22	1.26	N.S.
Time	3.80	1.09	3.46	1.20	.05
US News/World Rpt.	3.17	1.16	3.53	1.13	.05

* 1=Never Read, 5=Read Every Issue

Table 3

Frequency of Use of Opinion Journals As a Function of Political Party*

	Democrat N=99		Republican N=79		
Opinion Journals	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	p
Commentary	1.30	0.65	1.39	0.79	N.S.
Human Events	1.25	0.68	1.95	1.25	.0001
Nation	1.95	1.09	1.54	0.80	.005
National Review	2.03	1.14	2.85	1.30	.0001
New Republic	2.87	1.38	2.48	1.23	.05
Progressive	1.53	0.91	1.15	0.43	.0005

* 1=Never Read, 5=Read Every Issue

Table 4

Mean Credibility Ratings of Newspapers by Political Party and T-Test Results*

Newspapers	Bias	Completeness	Accuracy	Trustworthiness	Index
Christian Science Monitor					
GOP (N=62)	3.46	3.39	3.77	3.89	14.56
Dem (N=87)	3.73	3.66	4.17	4.21	15.75
p	N.S.	N.S.	.003	.04	.03
New York Times					
GOP (N=75)	2.47	3.37	3.50	3.33	12.67
Dem (N=97)	3.80	4.26	4.31	4.37	16.73
p	.0000	.0001	.0001	.0001	.0001
USAToday					
GOP (N=73)	3.42	2.10	2.92	3.00	11.62
Dem (N=95)	3.33	2.06	3.23	3.19	11.89
p	N.S.	N.S.	.01	N.S.	N.S.
Wall Street Journal					
GOP (N=77)	3.22	3.92	4.14	4.14	15.41
Dem (N=97)	2.69	3.37	3.90	3.74	13.65
p	.002	.0001	N.S.	.001	.0001
Washington Post					
GOP (N=77)	1.93	2.92	3.00	2.83	10.65
Dem (N=99)	3.36	4.07	4.13	4.18	15.73
p	.0000	.0001	.0001	.0001	.0001
Washington Times					
GOP (N=76)	2.49	2.95	3.11	3.01	11.10
Dem (N=98)	1.74	1.96	2.31	2.04	7.91
p	.004	.0000	.0000	.0000	.0000

* Components: 1-5 scale; Index Range: 4-20; The higher the rating, the more credible the publication is considered.

Table 5

Mean Credibility Ratings of Magazines by Political Party and T-Test Results*

Magazines	Bias	Completeness	Accuracy	Trustworthiness	Index
Atlantic Monthly					
GOP (N=48)	2.78	3.00	3.23	3.17	12.34
Dem (N=67)	3.31	3.59	3.80	3.86	14.74
P	.001	.002	.0002	.0000	.0001
Business Week					
GOP (N=62)	3.24	3.22	3.54	3.58	13.39
Dem (N=77)	2.94	3.33	3.55	3.59	13.40
P	.03	N.S.	N.S.	N.S.	N.S.
Congressional Quarterly					
GOP (N=71)	4.52	4.51	4.56	4.63	18.46
Dem (N=88)	4.55	4.53	4.70	4.69	18.51
P	N.S.	N.S.	N.S.	N.S.	N.S.
Forbes					
GOP (N=71)	3.08	3.31	3.53	3.60	13.44
Dem (N=70)	2.65	3.13	3.29	3.25	12.38
P	.006	N.S.	N.S.	.008	.03
Fortune					
GOP (N=58)	3.12	3.35	3.58	3.58	13.50
Dem (N=69)	2.67	3.19	3.31	3.25	12.47
P	.003	N.S.	.02	.01	.02
Insight					
GOP (N=60)	2.36	2.83	3.00	3.00	11.33
Dem (N=69)	1.82	2.04	2.33	2.08	8.14
P	.002	.0000	.0001	.0000	.0000

Table 5, Continued

Magazines	Bias	Completeness	Accuracy	Trustworthiness	Index
National Journal					
GOP (N=64)	3.41	3.73	3.94	3.94	15.27
Dem (N=83)	4.04	4.14	4.29	4.25	16.75
p	.001	.02	.009	N.S.	.02
New Dimensions on the News					
GOP (N=37)	2.30	2.50	2.64	2.56	10.03
Dem (N=40)	2.23	2.33	2.44	2.30	8.77
p	N.S.	N.S.	N.S.	N.S.	N.S.
Newsweek					
GOP (N=72)	2.43	2.74	3.00	2.78	10.79
Dem (N=87)	3.40	3.51	3.67	3.60	14.16
p	.0000	.0000	.0000	.0000	.0000
The Economist					
GOP (N=57)	3.14	3.55	3.70	3.70	14.02
Dem (N=71)	3.15	3.60	3.73	3.77	14.42
p	N.S.	N.S.	N.S.	N.S.	N.S.
Time					
GOP (N=72)	2.39	2.74	2.99	2.82	10.76
Dem (N=88)	3.26	3.46	3.71	3.59	14.07
p	.0000	.0001	.0000	.0000	.0000
U.S. News and World Report					
GOP (N=72)	3.32	3.38	3.57	3.54	13.85
Dem (N=84)	3.26	3.42	3.63	3.74	14.09
p	N.S.	N.S.	N.S.	N.S.	N.S.

* Components: 1-5 scale; Index Range: 4-20; The higher the rating, the more credible the publication is considered.

Table 6

Mean Credibility Ratings of Opinion Journals by Political Party and T-Test Results*

Opinion Journals	Bias	Completeness	Accuracy	Trustworthiness	Index
Commentary					
GOP (N=45)	2.00	2.66	2.98	2.93	10.59
Dem (N=51)	2.06	2.46	2.69	2.50	9.91
p	N.S.	N.S.	N.S.	.04	N.S.
Human Events					
GOP (N=54)	1.75	2.62	2.98	2.89	10.34
Dem (N=53)	1.75	2.10	2.28	2.08	8.33
p	N.S.	.008	.001	.0002	.005
Nation					
GOP (N=49)	1.58	2.18	2.34	2.38	8.42
Dem (N=57)	1.98	2.50	3.05	2.98	10.54
p	.01	N.S.	.0002	.004	.001
National Review					
GOP (N=60)	1.92	2.88	3.40	3.55	11.87
Dem (N=64)	1.68	2.24	2.52	2.37	8.88
p	N.S.	.0005	.0000	.0000	.0000
New Republic					
GOP (N=57)	1.98	2.70	3.13	3.18	11.06
Dem (N=67)	2.16	2.77	3.25	3.22	11.51
p	N.S.	N.S.	N.S.	N.S.	N.S.
Progressive					
GOP (N=48)	1.52	2.13	2.24	2.22	8.21
Dem (N=53)	1.90	2.42	2.98	2.82	10.17
p	.01	N.S.	.0001	.003	.0006

* Components: 1-5 scale; Index Range: 4-20; The higher the rating, the more credible the publication is considered.

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THE "BIMBO PRIMARIES": A COMPARISON OF HOW THE MAJOR TELEVISION NETWORKS COVERED CHARGES OF WOMANIZING AGAINST BILL CLINTON AND GARY HART

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Presented to the Radio-Television Journalism Division
at the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass
Commmunication Convention, Aug. 14, 1993 at Kansas City, Missouri

ABSTRACT

THE "BIMBO PRIMARIES": A COMPARISON OF HOW THE MAJOR TELEVISION NETWORKS COVERED CHARGES OF WOMANIZING AGAINST BILL CLINTON AND GARY HART

By Jeanne Norton Rollberg, Luther W. "Sonny" Sanders and Bill Rutherford, University of Arkansas at Little Rock

Accusations of "womanizing" led to Gary Hart's 1987 withdrawal of his bid to be president, but Bill Clinton survived rumors of marital infidelity and went on to win the presidential election in 1992.

The purpose of this study was to compare the three major television networks' coverage on their early evening newscasts of the Gary Hart-Donna Rice and Bill Clinton-Gennifer Flowers stories at the height of the controversies.

The networks gave greater emphasis to the Hart controversy--twice as many stories and more than three times as much air time.

Reporter, named source and unnamed source assertions about the candidates were coded as favorable, unfavorable or neutral. The coefficient of imbalance test showed all three networks were slightly biased against Hart. Two networks leaned slightly in favor of Clinton, and ABC's anti-Clinton bent was ever so slim that it hardly could be called intentional.

THE "BIMBO PRIMARIES": A COMPARISON OF HOW THE MAJOR TELEVISION NETWORKS COVERED CHARGES OF WOMANIZING AGAINST BILL CLINTON AND GARY HART

When then-Governor Bill Clinton and his wife, Hillary, appeared on a special post-Super Bowl edition of "60 Minutes" to deny rumors of his marital infidelity, it was the first time many Americans had been exposed to the candidate who, less than a year later, would become their president.[1]

Nearly 40 million viewers tuned in to the Jan. 26, 1992 telecast.[2] The appearance, focusing as it did on a character issue, was, to say the least, an inauspicious beginning for a little-known governor from the South who wanted to lead the free world.

The Clintons were responding to a story in the supermarket tabloid, the *Star*, dated Feb. 4 but with contents that had been leaked early, in which a former state employee from Arkansas, Gennifer Flowers, alleged that Clinton participated in a steamy extramarital affair with her for 12 years before breaking off the relationship.[3] The timing of the charges could hardly have been worse: the Arkansas governor faced the much-touted Feb. 18 New Hampshire Democratic primary contest, a race that could make or break his candidacy.[4]

The emergence of the Clinton-Flowers story marked the second time in five years that a "womanizing" issue about a leading presidential contender had been prominently displayed in the mainstream press. The story worried Clinton campaign officials because of the fallout from the most recent episode: candidate Gary Hart's race for the Democratic nomination had come to an abrupt standstill in 1987 after news reports of an alleged extramarital relationship with a 29-year-old woman named Donna Rice.[5]

The three major television networks, ABC, CBS and NBC all gave significant attention to the charges of womanizing against both Clinton and Hart. This is important because in spite of competition from the Cable News Network and other television offerings, in 1992 the three network evening newscasts combined still drew viewership in more than 25 million households nightly, thereby continuing to serve as an important agenda setter for the public.[6] Therefore, after a review of both the Clinton and Hart character issue stories and appropriate scholarly literature, this paper will compare network television evening newscast coverage of the Clinton and Hart stories.

In Bill and Hillary Clinton's unusual "60 Minutes" appearance, the governor denied accuser Gennifer Flowers' charges, re-affirmed his commitment to his marriage, and blasted the press for legitimizing a story in which the key source had been paid to tell her tale in a tabloid.[7]

It appeared that the "60 Minutes" appearance was designed to lessen the impact of a news conference Gennifer Flowers was scheduled to hold the next day in which "love tapes"[8] of her telephone conversations with Clinton were to be shared with reporters. Clearly, both Flowers and Clinton hoped to use television news/public affairs appearances to convince the public of their own truthfulness and of the untrustworthiness of each other.

New York magazine reporter Joe Klein dubbed the Clinton-Flowers story "The Bimbo Primary,"[9] complaining that the scandal was fueled by the media:

> The Great American Media-Driven Scandal has become the signal ritual of our public life. Books have been written...about the strict, almost anthropological set of customs and ceremonies that attend these events, as if they were Carthaginian human sacrifices.[10]

Rumors of Clinton's affairs had been hinted at in the national news media after the candidate and his wife, Hillary, had admitted publicly in September 1991 that their marriage had not been "perfect."[11] The rumors also had been widespread in the governor's home state, Arkansas, for years, and in 1988 a Gridiron show in Little Rock featured two lawyers portraying Gary Hart and Bill Clinton singing a duet, "To All the Girls We've Loved Before."[12]

But what made the *Star* story potentially so damning was that it was confirmed by a woman with whom he had supposedly had an affair. Though Flowers' credibility was questionable because of inconsistencies in her story,[13] the potential for damage to Clinton's candidacy was clear, especially when it was made known that she would hold a news conference about the article on Monday, Jan. 27.

The Jan. 26 "60 Minutes" interview with Bill and Hillary Clinton upstaged Flowers' appearance the next day, but in a way it legitimized the story further, making it "fair game" for news organizations that had been hesitant to publish it.[14]

During the weeks immediately after the Flowers charges, there was considerable handwringing as journalists reflected upon how their fellow professionals had handled the sex scandal story. As had happened with the Hart story five years earlier, there were discussions of the appropriateness of raising so-called character issues at all in the face of weightier topics.

As if to emphasize this point, writers interviewed political scientist Larry Sabato whose 1991 book "Feeding Frenzy: How Attack Journalism Has Transformed American Politics" accused journalists of practicing "junkyard dog" journalism in its coverage of the Gary Hart scandal and similar ones.[15]

But even though the pundits continued to discuss the journalism ethics issues in the trade press, the Clinton-Flowers story disappeared from the evening newscasts of the three major networks within four days of the Clintons' "60 Minutes" appearance. Unlike Gary Hart, Bill Clinton made it through the "Bimbo Primary" and went on to become president of the United States.

As stated earlier, Gary Hart bowed out of the presidential race in 1987 after blaming the press for what he dismissed as its sloppy follow-up coverage of a *Miami Herald* story alleging Hart's relationship with a 29-year-old model later identified as Donna Rice.[16] Hart said:

> We're all going to have to seriously question

> the system for selecting our national leaders that reduces the press of this nation to hunters and presidential candidates to being hunted.[17]

Hart was responding to the story, published Sunday, May 3, 1987 that said *Herald* reporters had followed a young woman from Miami to Washington the previous Friday and that the woman had spent Friday night and most of Saturday alone with Hart in his Washington townhouse while his wife, Lee, was in Colorado.[18]

Like Bill Clinton, Hart had been plagued by rumors of womanizing for years,[19] and it was more than a little ironic that on the very day the *Herald* published its story, *The New York Times* published an interview in which Hart had challenged the press to have him followed in order to quell what Hart said was unfounded gossip about his infidelity.[20]

Hart initially denied the Herald story through his campaign manager, but later he emerged with further denials as he told his own story at a meeting of the American Newspaper Publishers Association on Tuesday, May 5.[21]

By Friday, May 8, the end of Hart's candidacy was at hand. Peter Jennings of "ABC World News Tonight" opened its evening news program with the Hart story saying, "Frontrunner on Monday, off the charts on Friday. It's been a painful week for Gary Hart and his family and his followers."[22]

In Hart's speech withdrawing from the presidential race, the TV audience heard him concede that he had allowed himself to be put in situations that could be misconstrued. However, he maintained that his behavior had been open and aboveboard. He bitterly blamed the press for his demise, indicating that it had forced his withdrawal. He said, "I know I could have been a very good president, particularly for these times. But apparently now we'll never know."[23]

To summarize, while the Hart-Rice story resembled the Cinton-Flowers story in that marital fidelity was central to both, the two stories were dissimilar in some ways that may have affected media coverage.

The Clinton-Flowers story emerged when one of the two alleged principals-Gennifer Flowers-came forward with her story, whereas the Hart-Rice story was broken by a major national newspaper. In addition, the Clinton-Flowers relationship was said to have predated the presidential race while the Hart-Rice affair was reportedly concurrent with it.

Another difference in the two stories was how the two women involved dealt with the story. Flowers offered "proof" of her relationship with Clinton in the form of publicly aired audio tapes whereas Donna Rice stayed out of the media spotlight initially. And, finally, the two men handled the story differently. Hart initially denied the reports through a spokesperson, but Clinton and his wife appeared on "60 Minutes" to deal with the issue directly.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In 1979, Susannah Lessard had written a candid article about Sen. Edward Kennedy's alleged womanizing, saying it was an important campaign issue that deserved examination because of the insights such an unflattering aspect of his character might give about the judgment of a contender for the presidency. Still, in the 1980 campaign, the press never fully explored the issue.[24] However, in 1987, journalists covered the Gary Hart-Donna Rice story extensively, thereby signalling that the issue, under some circumstances, can be considered a legitimate news story. This, in turn, helped set the public's agenda of campaign issues to consider.

Surveys about past presidential campaigns have indicated that as many as 75 percent of those persons participating in polls said they became best acquainted with candidates for president and vice president through television, rather than through newspapers or other media. Respondents also have indicated they think television does either an "excellent or good" job of covering such national news.[25] The question journalists must come to ask, however, is whether that favorable evaluation of television news is warranted, particularly when such a spicy and potentially sensational story as the Clinton-Flowers and Hart-Rice stories emerge.

A study of television news coverage by Sanders, Rollberg and Rutherford of the 1987 Hart-Rice story showed that "NBC Nightly News" was nearly free of bias in its coverage of the story, with "ABC World News Tonight" showing the greatest bias, followed by the "CBS Evening News." In summary, all three networks showed slight bias against Gary Hart.[26]

Other studies dealing with political reporting generally have evaluated the reportage by considering several factors. One factor is emphasis, the amount of coverage a news story receives relative to the coverage of other stories. In her study of the "Eagleton Affair" in 1972, Edna F. Einsiedel noted that an audience's perception of a media event is influenced by the portion of the news hole devoted to a topic and the position of a story in the newscast (if it comes first, second or tenth in the program).[27]

But in addition to examining the amount of newscast time devoted to a topic, researchers also have been clearly interested in a more critical issue—whether content is biased or neutral. In a study of the 1972 campaign, Evarts and Stempel wrote that a pattern of imbalance (the decided presence of a favorable or unfavorable coverage of an issue) would be significant.[28] The study also indicated that sources of statements in stories should be examined to help determine bias. For example, whether stories were attributed to unnamed sources, named sources, or to no source would help determine if reporter bias was present. It was assumed that if a statement was not attributed to anyone, a reporter would have much greater opportunity to interject bias than he/she would in a statement attributed to an identifiable source.[29]

One way to quantify bias is Janis and Fadner's coefficient of imbalance. The coefficient of imbalance shows "an overall estimate of the degree of imbalance; i.e., the extent to which favorable, neutral, or unfavorable treatment is accorded to the topic or symbol under analysis."[30] In order to use the coefficient of imbalance, a researcher must define a unit of content, such as an assertion, and then consider the total units of content, the units of relevant content, and the units of irrelevant content. The units of relevant content can be classified as favorable, unfavorable or neutral.[31]

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to compare the three major television networks' coverage on their early evening newscasts of the Gary Hart-Donna Rice and Bill Clinton-Gennifer Flowers stories at the height of the controversies.

Specifically, the study sought to determine the amount of emphasis placed on the character-issue stories by the networks, and to determine whether the networks were objective or biased in their coverage.

This study was limited to the early evening newscasts of the three major television networks over two six-day periods: from Sunday, May 3, 1987, when the story broke in the *Miami Herald* that Gary Hart spent the night with Donna Rice, through Friday, May 8, 1987, when Hart withdrew as a candidate for the Democratic nomination for president of the United States; and Friday, Jan. 24, 1992, the day after contents of the *Star* story were leaked in the evening, through Wednesday, Jan. 29, 1992. the last day the story appeared on the three networks' evening newscasts as a continuing story, thus indicating the height of the controversy had passed.

Emphasis was determined by comparing number of stories, including commentaries, that were relevant to Hart or Clinton and the character issue with total number of stories in the newscasts; and comparing air time devoted to the Hart or Clinton character issue.

Bias was studied in terms of distribution of relevant assertions by source (reporter, named source or unnamed source); distribution of favorable, unfavorable and neutral assertions; and by coefficient of imbalance. Definitions of terms are in an appendix. The authors decided to examine commentaries separately from news stories for all bias factors in order to gain an accurate picture of the objectivity in reporting without cluttering that image with obvious editorialization.

This study examined how the networks reported the character-issue stories. No attempt was made to establish any value judgment on the character issues. Instead, an attempt was made to determine if the networks' coverage was biased (either favorably or unfavorably toward Hart or Clinton) or if the news coverage was objective.

Indices from the Vanderbilt Television News Archive and tapes of the television newscasts were examined to identify news stories relevant to the two candidates and the character issue. Relevant stories were transcribed and then all assertions were identified and coded in accordance with definitions. One of the authors served as coding trainer and supervisor.

To provide a systematic method to verify consistency of coding decisions, the coders did all coding on the transcripts before transferring the information to tally sheets. All coding for all transcripts was doublechecked by the trainer to assure coding consistency.

FINDINGS AND RESULTS

To determine the emphasis given by the networks to the character-issue stories, two factors were examined: (1) the number of stories relevant to the character issues compared with total number of stories in the newscasts, (2) air time devoted to the controversies compared with total news hole.

Based upon number of relevant stories, all three networks gave greater emphasis to the Hart character-issue story than to the Clinton character-issue story. Overall, the networks devoted 18 percent of their stories to the Hart issue but only 9 percent to the Clinton issue. ABC ran more stories about Hart than did the other networks while CBS ran more stories about Clinton.[32](See Table 1.)

In 1987, the mean for the networks was 13.2 total stories per newscast, but in 1992 the mean was 11.6 stories per newscast. The news hole was essentially the same, about 20 and a half minutes, thus indicating the networks were running slightly longer items in 1992. In fact, the networks' mean length of an individual story in

1992 was one minute, 47 seconds, which was 15 seconds longer than in 1987. However, the networks' mean length for 1992 items about Clinton was one minute, 38 seconds, which was 38 seconds shorter than 1987 items about Hart—another indication of the greater emphasis given to the Hart story.

Based upon percentage of air time, the networks gave more than three times as much emphasis to the Hart story as they did to the Clinton story. The networks averaged devoting 26 percent of their air time to the Hart story, but only 8 percent to the Clinton story. ABC devoted more of its air time (33 percent) to the Hart controversy than did the other networks, while CBS was the leader in percentage of news hole (10 percent) alloted to the Clinton controversy. (See Table 2.) CBS may have exceeded the other networks in percentage of news hole devoted to the story partly because another program on the network, "60 Minutes," figured prominently in the story.

To determine the presence or absence of bias by the networks in their coverage of the character issue stories, these factors were examined: (1) distribution of relevant assertions by source, (2) distribution of direction of assertions, (3) coefficient of imbalance.

An examination of the relevant content, excluding commentaries, indicated nearly three times as many relevant assertions about the Hart character issue as about the Clinton-Flowers controversy. The 999 Hart relevant assertions versus 365 Clinton relevant assertions is not surprising considering that the networks devoted more than three times as much air time to Hart.

At all three networks, reporters had a greater tendency to make relevant assertions without attribution about Clinton than they did about Hart. All three networks were more likely to use named sources concerning the Hart story than about the Clinton story. Unnamed source relevant assertions were few. (See Table 3.)

The ABC reporters had the greater opportunity to bias their stories in that they had higher percentages of reporter relevant assertions without attribution than did the other networks. Forty-eight percent of the ABC Hart relevant assertions and 58 percent of the ABC Clinton relevant assertions were made by reporters without attribution.

When the network reporters had the opportunity to slant their stories in unattributed assertions, they seldom did so in covering Clinton-Flowers. Eight-four percent of the networks' Clinton reporter relevant assertions were neutral, 10 percent were unfavorable and 6 percent were favorable. However, only 62 percent of the networks' Hart reporter relevant assertions were neutral. Thirty-three percent were unfavorable and 6 percent were favorable. (See Table 4.)

A majority of the all three networks' named source relevant assertions were neutral concerning Hart and Clinton. At all three networks, more of the named sources' relevant assertions were favorable to Hart and Clinton than were unfavorable. Hence, while reporters' assertions generally were more unfavorable than favorable—especially concerning Hart—the reverse was true for named sources.

ABC tied CBS for highest percentage of reporter unattributed unfavorable relevant assertions about Hart (37 percent), and ABC was the leader the leader in reporter unattributed unfavorable relevant assertions about Clinton (13 percent).

When reporter, named source and unnamed source relevant assertions were combined, a majority (Hart 57 percent, Clinton 68 percent) were neutral. (See Table 5.) At all three networks, unfavorable relevant assertions outnumbered favorable for Hart. For Clinton, favorable assertions outnumbered unfavorable assertions at CBS and NBC, and the numbers were within two percentage points at ABC. Overall, the networks had nearly twice as many favorable as unfavorable comments about Clinton.

The high degree of neutral assertions, especially among reporters, suggests a lack of bias by the networks. If there was any bias at all, Table 4 suggests it could have been at CBS and NBC in selection of sources who were more likely to give positive statements about Clinton or defend him. However, the degree of imbalance is so slight it is more likely to be merely the result of attempts to report both sides of the controversy.

As an additional means of evaluating the overall relationship between favorable and unfavorable relevant assertions for the three networks, the coefficient of imbalance test was applied.

The test results hovered near 0.0, which would have indicated no bias. Specifically, the coefficient of imbalance for all three networks combined was -0.0158 for Hart and +0.0195 for Clinton, therefore indicating a very slight bias against Hart and a very slight bias in favor of Clinton.

For Hart, ABC showed the greatest bias against the candidate (-0.0305), followed by CBS (-0.0152) and NBC (-0.0034). For Clinton, ABC was the only network showing any bias against the candidate (-0.0029–an amount so scant that it rounds down to 0.00). CBS was the network most favorable toward Clinton (+0.0493), followed by NBC (+0.0344).[33]

The authors decided to include commentaries in the total news hole and to record commentaries as relevant stories because they would be part of the indication of emphasis. However, in order to provide an accurate evaluation of the objectivity of news reporting, the decision was made to exclude commentaries from the above discussion of relevant assertions.

No commentaries were found in the CBS content. ABC and NBC each telecast two about Hart. NBC also ran one commentary concerning Clinton. ABC was slightly negative toward Hart in its commentaries, which scored -0.0147 on the coefficient of imbalance. The strongest coefficient of imbalance score in this study was NBC's -0.2948 for its anti-Hart stand in commentaries. NBC was kinder to Clinton with a coefficient of +0.0247.[34]

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

The three major television networks clearly gave greater emphasis to the Hart character issue than to the Bill Clinton controversy–twice as many stories and more than three times as much air time.

The emphasis given by the networks to the Clinton-Flowers matter was short lived. By Thursday, Jan. 30, the story was on none of the networks' early evening newscasts, and this may have been because the networks had other sex-related stories to air. All three networks reported on the beginning of boxer Mike Tyson's rape trial on Thursday. All three networks reported on a Federal Drug Administration advisory panel's preliminary approval of a female condom on Friday.

Bill and Hillary Clinton's aggressive approach to damage control by appearing on an abbreviated special edition of "60 Minutes" after the Super Bowl on Sunday apparently was effective. The Clintons may have learned how to handle this kind of story after having seen another candidate deal with it ineffectively five years earlier.

The application of the coefficient of imbalance test indicated that the networks were nearly free of bias in their treatment of both Hart and Clinton. However, all three networks did show slight bias against Hart. Clinton fared better. None of the networks was harsh toward Clinton in their coverage of the character issue. In fact, two networks leaned slightly in favor of Clinton, and ABC's anti-Clinton bent was ever so slim that it hardly could be called intentional. The pro-Clinton slant also may have been related to the previously-mentioned credibility problems that arose about Gennifer Flowers after her press conference, and to the fact that the alleged affair was said to have ended before Clinton’s entrance into the presidential race.

The pro-Clinton bias on the Clinton-Flowers coverage is consistent with later research about the networks’ coverage of Clinton on the evening news. That research indicated that the networks’ evening news coverage treated the Arkansas governor generally more favorably than competitors George Bush or Ross Perot during the fall campaign period.[35]

Moreover, the authors believe that differences in the two stories themselves also may have caused the networks to cover Hart slightly less favorably than Clinton.

For example, the Clinton-Flowers story emerged when an alleged former lover herself came forward in the tabloid *Star* and on television to tell her story, but Gennifer Flowers’ previously mentioned credibility problems may have made TV networks highly suspicious of her story. Meanwhile, the Hart-Rice story appeared after surveillance by reporters in the more subdued and mainstream *Miami Herald* newspaper, which had a reputation for distinguished political coverage, and hence network decisionmakers may have believed the allegations against Hart were more credible than those against Clinton because of the sources of the stories.

In addition, the Clinton-Flowers relationship was said by Flowers to have pre-dated the presidential race while the Hart-Rice relationship, though briefer, was reported to have occurred during the race. This was especially damaging to Gary Hart since he had taunted the press to follow him, saying he was innocent of past womanizing charges against him. The *Miami Herald* story made Hart appear to be both an indiscreet womanizer and an arrogant liar.

It also is possible that the Hart story got significantly more attention than the Clinton story because Hart's was the first such story about a major presidential contender that brought about his withdrawal from the race. That made it unique, and uniqueness is a staple of news.

By the time the Clinton-Flowers story appeared, however, the networks news organizations may have concluded that they had overplayed the Hart story, so they may have chosen to exercise restraint on the evening news when covering the potentially sensational Clinton scandal. The networks also may have been sensitive to earlier criticism like that by Larry Sabato in his 1991 book *Feeding Frenzy: How Attack Journalism Has Transformed American Politics*, that the news media in general had handled the Hart story badly, causing a viable candidate to exit the race.

Clinton had made no request that the press follow him, and he and his wife had publicly admitted past trouble in their marriage. Then when Flowers' charges emerged, the Clintons appeared on the hard-hitting "60 Minutes" to quell the rumors, presenting a unified front and the appearance of forthrightness.

While this study did not evaluate the ethical aspects of how TV or other news media should cover such character-issue stories, further studies might examine the role the journalists believe they should play when such stories about candidates' private lives emerge. In addition, research about how the public views such stories and particularly whether it sees the stories as *relevant* in the political selection process might be useful to media agenda setters.

ENDNOTES

[1] Joe Klein, "The Bimbo Primary: Bill Clinton Confronts the Media's Heart of Darkness and His Own," *New York*, Feb. 10, 1992, p. 25.

[2] Rich Brown, "Clinton coverage: media get mileage, flak," *Broadcasting*, Feb. 3, 1992, p. 13.

[3] Marion Collins, "My 12-Year Affair with Bill Clinton," *Star*, Feb. 4, 1992, pp. 24, 36-37.

[4] Jonathan Alter, Ginny Carroll, Howard Fineman and Mary Talbot, "Substance vs. Sex," *Newsweek*, Feb. 3, 1992, p. 19.

[5] Tim Schreiner, "You Can't Ignore News...and those tabs aren't all from Mars any longer," *Washington Journalism Review*, April 1992, p. 34.

[6] "CBS Evening News Tops Other Networks," *Kansas City Star*, March 14, 1992, p. F-8.

[7] "CBS Evening News" transcript, 24 Jan. 1992.

[8] Eleanor Clift, Howard Fineman and Ginny Carroll, "Character Questions," *Newsweek*, Feb. 10, 1992, p. 27.

[9] Klein, p. 22.

[10] Ibid., p. 24.

[11] Ibid., p. 23.

[12] Michael Krammer, "Moment of Truth," *Time*, Feb. 3, 1992, p. 12.

[13] As *Newsweek* noted in its Feb. 3, 1992, issue on page 20, the inconsistencies in her story included claims that she had met with Clinton at a Little Rock hotel in 1979 or 1980 although the hotel did not even open until two years later. Flowers also claimed that Clinton called her from the Governor's Mansion on dates when he actually was in Chicago, Florida and Washington. Questions about her veracity abounded after further investigation revealed that Flowers had embellished her résumé and work accomplishments.

[14] Brown, p. 13.

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[15] Sue O'Brien, "Privacy," *The Quill*, November/December 1992, p. 9.

[16] Jim McGee and Tom Fiedler, "Miami woman is linked to Hart; candidate denies any impropriety," *Miami Herald*, 3 May 1987, p. 1A, computer printout from Miami Herald database.

[17] "CBS Evening News" transcript, 8 May 1987.

[18] McGee, loc. cit.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Tom Morgenthau, Margaret Garrard Warner, Howard Fineman, Eric Calonious, "The Sudden Fall of Gary Hart," *Newsweek*, May 18, 1987, p. 28.

[21] Deborah Gersh, "Miami Herald vs. Gary Hart," *Editor and Publisher*, May 9, 1987, p. 14.

[22] "ABC World News Tonight" transcript, 8 May 1987.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Susannah Lessard, "Kennedy's Woman Problem: Women's Kennedy Problem," *Washington Monthly*, Dec. 1979, p. 11.

[25] Burns Roper, "Public Attitudes Toward Television and Other Media in a Time of Change," (New York: Television Information Office), May 1985, pp. 8, 17.

[26] Luther W. "Sonny" Sanders, Jeanne Norton Rollberg and Bill Rutherford, "Gary Hart and the Character Issue: How the Television Networks Reported It," paper presented at the Arkansas Political Science Association Annual Meeting, Feb. 26, 1988, pp. 12-13.

[27] Edna F. Einsiedel, "Television Network News Coverage of the Eagleton Affair: A Case Study," *Journalism Quarterly* 52 (Spring 1975): 60.

[28] Dru Evarts and Guido H. Stempel III, "Coverage of the 1972 Campaign by TV, News Magazines, and Major Newspapers," *Journalism Quarterly* 51 (Winter 1974): 646.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Irving L. Janis and Raymond Fadner, "The Coefficient of Imbalance," in Harold D. Lasswell, Nathan Leites and Associates,

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Language of Politics (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The M.I.T. Press, 1968), p. 155.

[31] Ibid.

[32] CBS ran more stories about Clinton than did the other networks even though CBS had only five early-evening newscasts over the six-day period of the study. CBS did not carry an early evening newscast on Sunday, Jan. 26, 1992, because the network was showing the Super Bowl football game.

[33] The Hart coefficients of imbalance are based upon ABC's 60 favorable, 104 unfavorable and 206 neutral relevant assertions, and 35 irrelevant assertions; CBS' 58 favorable, 76 unfavorable and 158 neutral relevant assertions and 17 irrelevant assertions; and NBC's 62 favorable, 68 unfavorable and 207 neutral relevant assertions, and 20 irrelevant assertions. The Clinton coefficients are based upon ABC's 18 favorable, 21 unfavorable and 106 neutral relevant assertions, and four irrelvant assertions; CBS's 39 favorable, 10 unfavorable, 101 neutral relevant assertions, and three irrelevant assertions; and NBC's 19 favorable, 10 unfavorable and 41 neutral relevant assertions, and one irrelevant assertion.

[34] The ABC coefficient of imbalance for commentaries is based upon 22 favorable, 25 unfavorable and 23 neutral relevant assertions,and three irrelevant assertions. The NBC Hart coefficient is based upon one favorable, 16 unfavorable and five neutral relevant assertions, and 15 irrelevant assertions. The NBC Clinton coefficient of imbalance is based upon two favorable, no unfavorable and seven neutral relevant assertions, and nine irrelevant assertions.

[35] Jeffrey Katz, "Tilt? Did the Media Favor Bill Clinton or Did George Bush Earn His Negative Coverage?," *Washington Journalism Review*, January/February 1993, p. 24.

TABLE 1

Total Stories vs. Relevant Stories (including commentaries)

Networks	Total Stories	Relevant Stories Total	Relevant Stories Daily Mean	Relevant Stories Percent of Total
ABC				
Hart	80	19	3.2	24%
Clinton	75	6	1.0	8%
CBS				
Hart	83	11	1.8	13%
Clinton*	55	7	1.4	13%
NBC				
Hart	74	13	2.2	18%
Clinton	68	4	0.7	6%
Total for Networks				
Hart	237	43	2.4	18%
Clinton	198	17	1.0	9%

* CBS telecast five early evening newscasts during the Clinton study period while the other networks telecast six.

TABLE 2

News Hole vs. Relevant Story Time Expressed in Minutes and Seconds (including commentaries)

Networks	News Hole Total	Relevant Story Time Total	Relevent Story Time Daily Mean	Relevant Stories Percent of News Hole	Relevant Story Length Mean
ABC					
Hart	123:50	41:00	6:50	33%	2:09
Clinton	126:20	11:10	1:52	9%	1:52
CBS					
Hart	120:16	24:15	4:02	20%	2:12
Clinton	102:30	10:30	2:06	10%	1:30
NBC					
Hart	122:50	32:20	5:23	26%	2:29
Clinton	124:40	6:00	1:00	5%	1:30

TABLE 3

Percentage of Relevant Assertions by Source (excluding commentaries)

Networks		Reporter	Named Source	Unnamed Source
ABC				
Hart	(n=370)	48%	51%	1%
Clinton	(n=145)	58%	39%	3%
CBS				
Hart	(n=292)	43%	54%	2%
Clinton	(n=150)	47%	47%	5%
NBC				
Hart	(n=337)	40%	57%	2%
Clinton	(n=70)	44%	50%	6%
Total for Networks				
Hart	(n=999)	44%	54%	2%
Clinton	(n=365)	51%	45%	4%

TABLE 4

Percentage of Favorable, Unfavorable and Neutral Relevant Assertions by Source (excluding commentaries)

Networks	Reporter			Named Source			Unnamed Source		
	F	U	N	F	U	N	F	U	N
ABC									
Hart	6%	37%	58%	26%	21%	54%	33%	0%	67%
Clinton	2%	13%	85%	26%	18%	56%	25%	0%	75%
CBS									
Hart	6%	37%	57%	30%	16%	54%	33%	50%	17%
Clinton	6%	7%	87%	41%	7%	52%	75%	0%	25%
NBC									
Hart	5%	24%	71%	26%	18%	55%	50%	12%	38%
Clinton	16%	10%	74%	34%	14%	51%	50%	50%	0%
Total for Networks									
Hart	6%	33%	62%	27%	18%	54%	41%	24%	35%
Clinton	6%	10%	84%	34%	12%	53%	56%	12%	31%

TABLE 5

Percentage of Total Favorable, Unfavorable and Neutral Relevant Assertions (excluding commentaries)

Networks	Favorable	Unfavorable	Neutral
ABC			
Hart	16%	28%	56%
Clinton	12%	14%	73%
CBS			
Hart	20%	26%	54%
Clinton	26%	7%	67%
NBC			
Hart	18%	20%	61%
Clinton	27%	14%	59%
Total for Networks			
Hart	18%	25%	57%
Clinton	21%	11%	68%

DEFINITIONS

Relevant story: A news item in which the central theme is Hart in 1987 or Clinton in 1992 and the character issue. Stories about other campaign principals are not relevant stories if there are only incidental mentions of Hart or Clinton and the character issue. However, if an item about anyone or anything else has as its central theme a discussion of Hart or Clinton and the character issue, it is a relevant story.

Irrelevant story: A news item in which the central theme is not Hart or Clinton and the character issue. A news story focusing on illegal aliens is considered irrelevant.

Relevant story time: The number of minutes and seconds devoted to relevant stories, including commentaries.

News hole: The total amount of time in the half-hour newscasts devoted to both relevant and irrelevant stories; the total time allotted in the half-hour newscasts to news and commentaries.

Assertion: A group of words containing a subject, a verb and an object, thus making a complete thought. Several assertions can appear within a single sentence. For example, the statement that "Hart (or Clinton) arrived at the TV studio" is considered an assertion.

Relevant assertion: An assertion about Hart or Clinton and the character issue. It may be coded favorable, unfavorable or neutral in its attitude toward him. For example, the statement that "Hart (or Clinton) talked with his advisers" is considered a relevant assertion.

Irrelevant assertion: An assertion not about Hart or Clinton or the character issue. For example, the statement that "Many illegal aliens live in the United States" is considered irrelevant because it does not have Hart or Clinton as the object and therefore cannot be favorable.

Favorable assertion: An assertion is favorable to Hart or Clinton when it portrays him in a favorable light. For example, the statement that "Gary Hart (or Bill Clinton) would be a wonderful president" is considered a favorable assertion. An assertion is considered favorable when "loaded" words positive toward Hart or Clinton are used.

Unfavorable assertion: An assertion that treats Hart or Clinton in a negative manner. For example, a statement that "Hart (or Clinton) lies outlandishly about his age" is considered negative. An assertion is considered unfavorable when "loaded" words negative toward Hart or Clinton are used.

Neutral assertion: An assertion that is not biased in either a positive or negative direction toward Hart orClinton. For example, the statement "Hart (or Clinton) was on television today" is considered a neutral assertion. It is a statement of fact without bias. An assertion is considered neutral when no "loaded" words are used but the assertion is made in an objective manner.

Source of assertion: The person to whom the assertion is attributed. Sources may be the reporter, a named source or an unnamed source.

Reporter as source: No attribution to anyone else is given. The reporter simply makes the assertion as an observer.

Named source: Attribution is given to a clearly identified person; a specified agency, such as "the FBI" when it is readily apparent that this is an official source of the agency; or a specified organization or group, such as "the NAACP" when it is readily apparent that this is an official source of the organization or group. For example, a spokesman for the FBI or the NAACP, even though not identified by name, is classified as a named source.

Unnamed source: Attribution is not given to a clearly identified person, or an official source of a specified agency, organization or group. For example, "the U.S." is too broad to be a source. However, "the White House" indicates the Reagan or Bush administration and is coded as a named source. "Usually reliable source," "a reliable source" and "a source" all are unnamed sources. If the source cannot be traced and identified by person, agency, organization or group it is unnamed. A statement by a source is attributed to that source. For example, in a Hart or Clinton sound bite everything that Hart or Clinton says is coded as from a named source.

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[1] Richard W. Budd and Robert K. Thorp, *An Introduction to Content Analysis* (Iowa City: State University of Iowa, 1963) pp. 18-19; Manny Paraschos and Bill Rutherford, "Network News Coverage of the Israeli Invasion of Lebanon," 1983 (unpublished manuscript), footnote 22, unnumbered page.

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Newsmagazine Visuals and the 1992 Presidential Election

by

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Presented to the Magazine Division at the annual convention of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communications, August, 1933, Kansas City, MO.

Newsmagazine Visuals and the 1992 Presidential Election

The 1992 presidential election was more complex than previous elections because of the candidacy of Ross Perot and the more active roles played by the vice presidential candidates and the candidate's wives. The emotional intensification of the campaign due to Perot's candidacy only added to the drama of a supposedly safe incumbent being attacked successfully by a youthful, and largely unknown challenger.

In spite of the difficulty, the press coverage of the 1992 election was lauded by Everette E. Dennis, executive director of the Freedom Forum Media Studies Center, as "what may well be the best election coverage in the history of the United States."[1] This study seeks to test the Dennis thesis in at least one area of news coverage--the visual communication of the campaign imagery in the three national newsmagazines.

PREVIOUS STUDIES

This study is a continuation of research investigating the visual coverage of presidential campaigns beginning with the 1984 election.

In the 1984 campaign, a study of the visuals used in the three U.S. newsmagazines found that the incumbent Republicans received significantly more photos and more favorable visual coverage than did the challengers, although the Democratic candidates received more favorable treatment during the homestretch period of the campaign.[2]

A similar study of the 1988 campaign also found that the Republican candidates received more visual coverage and more coverage of a positive nature. While Bush was not an incumbent president, he was a member of the team, so incumbency may have been a factor in this campaign as well as in 1984.[3]

This study continues the analysis of the visual coverage of the presidential election to determine if both, or in this case, all candidates received equivalent amounts of visual space, position, and treatment.

Content and Bias. In addition to visual coverage of elections, previous presidential studies have investigated coverage of the issues and indications of bias. Studies of presidential election coverage often compare the issue and horserace aspects of the coverage. In addition, preferential treatment leading to a presumption of possible bias in coverage has also been the subject of campaign studies.[4]

These studies have coded position on the page and measured the amount of space to identify partisan patterns as well as weight of the content, i.e., methodologies such as assertion analysis, as well as content analysis, have been used to tease out structure of content, tone and orientation (positive, negative, neutral).

Other Visual Communication Research. Visual communication has also been investigated to determine differences in the way the media depict candidates and political events. In particular, the agenda-setting value of photographs has been studied by Wayne Wanta and Doris Graber.[5]

Other studies of the visual treatment of news events have looked at coverage of gender roles, the McCarthy Coverage, African famines, and trends in newspaper photography.[6]

Presentation and Re-presentation. Actual presentation of a candidate's image is controlled both by the way the candidate presents him or herself and by the re-presentation through the selection and manipulation of media images. Aspects of the image, such as site and staging of the event, props and banners, and dress as well as other appearance factors, are under the control of the candidate or campaign planners. Studies in person presentation have analyzed various dimensions of presentation factors, including what Kaid and Davison call "pseudo-interpersonal communication" similar to an actor playing a role.[7]

The setting and the props are important elements in the role of a candidate. John studied the use of visual symbols in the 1988 campaign to determine how the candidates embedded visual reference symbolism to extend the symbolic meanings in their campaign messages.[8]

Other visual factors such as camera angle, lighting (to some degree), and framing are managed by the media and evaluated in terms of their aesthetic and, to some degree, rhetorical meanings.[9]

In some areas there is overlapping control. Expression, for example, is initially determined by the candidate, however, the editor typically has a number of photos to choose from with a range of expressions and can usually select one depicting either a smiling or serious candidate.

In addition, research in person perception suggests that readers and viewers are adept at making personal judgments about people on the basis of a few observable cues. Graber has found that through the use of complex person schemas, her respondents were able to articulate meanings they attributed to particular human characteristics, behaviors, roles, and personalities.[10]

METHODOLOGY

This content analysis generally replicated the 1984 and 1988 studies which counted and measured photos and coded various dimensions of visual language that can be manipulated to cue a more positive or negative interpretation.

It examined all photographs of the presidential and vice-presidential candidates and their spouses, including Ross Perot and his wife, printed in the three national weekly newsmagazines--*U.S. News & World Report, Time,* and *Newsweek* between the labor day kickoff and a week after the general election (September 7 to November 16, 1993). A total of 249 photographs was analyzed in the 33 magazines. Presidential and vice presidential candidates and their wives appeared 342 times in those 249 photographs.

Every photo containing a candidate picture was included in the study. A photograph containing more than one candidate was counted once, but the photo size allocated to each person was apportioned based on the amount of horizontal space dominated by that person. A separate codesheet was completed for each person in the photo evaluating that person's individual visual presence.

Visual Attributes

In the first two studies, the photographs were deconstructed analyzing a total of 15 visual attributes.The attributes--activity, posture, arms, hands, eyes, expression, interaction, camera angle, portrayal, position, size, props, setting, dress, and family--were grouped into three indices: behavior (activity, posture, arms, hands, eyes, and expression), context (props, setting, dress, and interaction), and perspective (position, size, camera angle, and portrayal).

This study continues that analysis but refined the definitions and added a new attribute, color. Specifically, the photos were coded as either black and white or full color and, if full-color, then the photo was further analyzed to see if the red-white-and blue combination was being used as a patriotism cue.

This factor was added to the study because of a comment in a review of a book on the Clinton victory. As quoted by John Durniak in his *Chicago Sun Times* photography column, Roger Rosenblatt, *Vanity Fair* contributing editor, hailed the power of black-and-white pictures in political photography and observed that "there is something numbing and emotionally draining about the proliferation of reds, whites and blues." He speculated that, "when they are blared day in and day out, not only do people lose their enthusiasm for a campaign, but they feel a kind of embittered weariness. . . ."11

Research Questions

The research questions guiding this study, as well as the previous studies, focus on whether the candidates are given equivalent amounts of space and position, as well as aesthetic treatment. More specifically, the study investigated:

1. Is there any difference among the news magazines in the amount of coverage of the candidates (presidential and vice presidential candidates)?
2. Is there any difference in the coverage of the candidates in terms of the indices--behavior, context, and perspective--as well as the new dimension of color?
3. Is there any difference in the size of photos published during different time periods of the campaign--the warmup, the debates, and the home stretch?

Coding Procedure

This analysis deconstructed the visual images in the photographs in terms of 15 visual attributes. These elements were rated +1, 0, -1, which represented either a favorable-less favorable-neutral construct or assigned values that were less directional such as business dress, unclear dress, casual dress.

Coding Criteria. For those 11 attributes that carried an directional valence, the rating was based upon a set of guidelines which were developed from evaluation criteria discussed in the literature review. Table 1 summarizes the attributes and their coding guidelines. The asterisk identifies those attributes that were considered to have a directional component.

Table 1

Visual Attributes for Presidential Candidates

Attributes	More favorable or image cue (+1)	Less favorable or image cue (-1)
I. Body Language and Behavior		
*1. Disposition:	pleased/happy/cheerful	unhappy/annoyed
*2. Activity:	active/animated	passive/relaxed/sitting
*3. Arms:	overhead/victory	down/at rest
*4. Hands:	gesturing/doing something	at rest/behind back
*5. Posture:	upright/standing tall	bowed/slumped
*6. Eye contact:	direct/looking at camera	looking away/avoidance
II. Context		
*7. Props:	flags/banners/signs	charts/briefcase/folder
*8. Setting:	formal/office/important	informal/casual
*9. Dress:	dignified/suit & tie	casual/sports clothes
*10. Interaction	with others	alone
*11. Family:	with family	no family
III. Perspective		
12. Camera angle:	looking up at	looking down on
13. Placement:	top of page (middle)	bottom
14. Size:	larger than 1/2 (1/4-1/2)	smaller than 1/4
15. Treatment:	dignified/serious	playful/funny/goofy
16. Colors	Red-White-Blue	Black-and-white

Indices. Three indices were constructed by combining attributes.The indices and their attributes are as follows:

I. Behavior: activity, posture, arms, hands, eyes, expression

II. Context: props, setting, dress, social interaction

III. Perspective: position, size, camera angle, portrayal

Analysis. Differences in candidate attributes were tested by means of One-Way ANOVA techniques, including Scheffe Tests for three-way comparisons between candidates. ANOVA techniques were used to determine if the candidates, newsmagazines, or the time period interacted with picture size.

Intercoder Reliability. All 33 issues were coded by one of the investigators, who made 12,312 judgements concerning the pictorial coverage in the three newsmagazines. One issue of each newsmagazine was randomly selected for a reliability test, and the second investigator coded the three test magazines to establish reliability for the study. The second coder made 1044 judgements for the test issues, which resulted in a Scott's *pi* of .79.[12]

FINDINGS

Overall coverage of the presidential and vice presidential candidates by the three newsmagazines was strikingly similar in 1992, with the exception of party coverage. Democrats received significantly more coverage as they appeared 134 times (45%), compared to 101 (34%) appearances by Republicans. The Perot ticket appeared 63 times (22%). The differences in percentages between the three tickets was significant ($X^2 = 25.50$, df=2, $p < .01$), as the number of appearances by Democrats was significantly greater than the other two tickets, and the number of appearances by the Perot ticket was significantly less than the other two. Bill Clinton appeared in 112 of the photos; Bush, 87; Perot, 58; Gore, 22; Quayle, 14; and Stockdale, 5. Since the number of pictures involving vice-presidential candidates was so small, it was difficult to include anything other than anecdotal data for those candidates in this study

Newsmagazines. All three newsmagazines published a similar number of appearances by the presidential and vice-presidential candidates. *U.S. News & World Report* carried the most with

101 pictures (34%). *Newsweek* was close behind with 100 pictures (34%), and *Time* published 97 photos (33%) with candidates included. Bill Clinton appeared in 44% of the photos devoted to presidential candidates, Bush, 34%; and Perot, 23%. Clinton's percentage difference was significant ($X^2 = 6.73$, df=2, $p < .05$).

Time Periods. Trying to analyze time period differences in newsmagazine coverage of the 1992 presidential campaign was confounded by two different events. First, Ross Perot did not reenter the race until October 5. And second, the series of three presidential and vice-presidential debates was confined to an eight day period between October 11 and October 19. However, investigators decided to create three time periods out of the selected campaign period. Time 1 was comprised of newsmagazine issues from September 7 to September 28; Time 2 was comprised of issues from October 5 to October 19; and Time 3 was comprised of issues from October 26 to November 16. Evaluation of the number of pictures published by the three newsmagazines and how the number of those pictures was affected by the Perot reentry and the debates revealed a significant difference. As Table 2 shows, the significant difference was caused by the small number of Perot pictures published by the newsmagazines, and not by the debates. Perot was not covered by the newsmagazines until his reentry into the race, but once that occurred he received picture coverage similar to George Bush. It should be noted that Bill Clinton's significant edge over Bush was partially the result of the photo coverage in the November 16 issue of all three newsmagazines. The November 16 issue was a campaign wrap-up issue for all three magazines, and the focus of all three was concerned with the

TABLE 2

Presidential Candidate Photos by Three Time Periods

	Time 1	Time 2	Time 3	Totals
George Bush	28	24	35	87
Bill Clinton	25	20	67	112
Ross Perot	3	25	30	58
Totals	56	69	132	257

$X^2 = 24.08$, df = 4, $p < .001$

incoming administration. Clinton had 29 photos in that last issue compared to 10 for George Bush.

Size of Visuals. As in two previous studies, investigators were interested to see if the size of the visuals devoted to the candidates were related to the magazines in which the photos were published or to the time periods during which the photos appeared. A three-way ANOVA table (3x3x3) was constructed for the presidential candidates, and mean pica size of the photos was the dependent variable. However, unlike previous studies, the ANOVA analysis revealed no significant interactions or main effects (F = 1.146, df = 6/232, sig. = .336). Over three time periods, the mean size of presidential candidate pictures was substantially similar in all three newsmagazines.

TABLE 3
Presidential Candidate Mean Scores for 15 Visual Attributes

	Bush	Clinton	Perot
Disposition	1.94	2.16	1.93
Activity	2.03	1.99	1.76
Arms	1.89	1.96	1.84
Hands	2.21	2.33*	1.93
Posture	2.53	2.64	2.57
Eye contact	2.09	1.91	2.03
Props	2.19	2.26	2.23
Setting	2.01	1.99	2.40**
Dress	2.48	2.50	2.91**
Interaction	2.63	2.59	2.57
Family	1.26	1.32	1.31
Camera Angle	2.05	2.13	1.97
Placement	2.36	2.48	2.47
Pix Size	1.49	1.57	1.55
Treatment	2.89*	2.69	2.88

*p < .05
**Attribute significant over two other opponents, p < .05

Candidates. Analysis of the presidential candidates by means of 15 visual attributes provided a few interesting contrasts (See Table 3). President Bush was rated significantly high in terms of the dignified and serious treatment he received in the photos published. His photos were judged to be more serious than those of Bill Clinton, but equal to those of Ross Perot. Bill Clinton's hands were significantly more active in his photos than were the hands of Bush and Perot in their photos. Perot scored significantly high in two areas. Most of his photos showed him in more formal and business settings, and almost always he was pictured in more dignified dress, i.e., business suit. On both attributes, Perot's rating was significantly higher than both Bush and Clinton.

Investigators attempted to measure use of colors by the candidates and the newsmagazines (See Table 4). Although the presidential candidates were predominantly portrayed in four-color photos, some differences involving the use of red-white-blue, and black-and-white photos did surface. Bush appeared in more pictures with red-white-blue backgrounds, while Clinton was portrayed in a large number of black-and-white photos. What is interesting to note is that Clinton did not have any control over the black-and-white photos which appeared. Most of his black-and-white photos were file photos dredged up by the newsmagazines to provide readers with perspective on his college days in the 1960's and his early entry into politics.

TABLE 4

Use of Color in Presidential Candidate Photographs

	Red/White/Blue	4-Color	Black/White
George Bush	21	63	1
Bill Clinton	18	72	21
Ross Perot	9	49	0
Totals	48	184	22

In summary, presidential candidate Bill Clinton appeared in more photos in three newsmagazines than did his two opponents, but that was the only advantage he enjoyed in the newsmagazines during the 1992 campaign. Neither the reentry of Ross Perot into the presidential race, nor the series of three debates affected how the newsmagazines played the presidential candidates. Findings show that all three candidates received virtually the same consideration by all three newsmagazines. And, as in the 1988 study, vice-presidential candidates went virtually unnoticed in 1992 campaign pictures.

CONCLUSIONS

In comparison to two previous studies conducted on 1984 and 1988 presidential campaign visuals, the three major newsmagazines in this country did a better job in 1992 of balancing presidential candidate coverage than they did in the previous two elections.

In 1984, incumbent Republicans received significantly more photos and more favorable visual coverage than did the Democrats. In 1988, Republicans again received more photo coverage. Bush photos were significantly larger and he was more presented more positively than was Dukakis. In 1992, although Clinton appeared in more photos, mean picture size of all three presidential candidates was essentially the same. Both Bush and Clinton scored significantly higher on only one visual attribute, while Perot scored highest on two. Both Bush and Perot were portrayed in photos in more serious and dignified ways than was Clinton. Whether that was a disadvantage to Bush and Perot and an advantage to Clinton is speculation for another study. One thing seems certain, however, all three candidates were judged strikingly similar in the visual attributes which emanated from their photos.

The question concerning use of color in the photographs presents some interesting contrasts. Although Bush used the patriotism issue with great effect in his 1988 campaign against Governor Dukakis, that same strategy was not as effective in 1992. Bush was able to explore publicly the same question about Governor Clinton, and the newsmagazines reached back to uncover a large number of black-and-white photos concerning Clinton's past. However, those would-be "negative" photographs and the perspective provided by Bush and the newsmagazines did not seem hamper Clinton's campaign. Did the use of red-white-blue for Bush create a backlash effect? And why did the use of black-and-white Clinton photos from times past not prove detrimental to his campaign? These are questions which deserve further study.

NOTES

[1] *The Finish Line: Covering the Campaign's Final Days,* New York: The Freedom Forum Media Studies Center, 1993.

[2] Sandra E. Moriarty and Gina M. Garramone, "A Study of Newsmagazine Photographs of the 1984 Presidential Campaign," *Journalism Quarterly,* 63:728-734 (1986).

[3] Sandra E. Moriarty and Mark N. Popovich, Newsmagazine Visuals and the 1988 Presidential Election, " *Journalism Quarterly,* 68:371-380 (1991).

[4] Richard Hofstetter, *Bias in the News--Network Television Coverage of the 1972 Election Campaign* (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1976); Erica G. King, "Thematic Coverage of the 1988 Presidential Primaries: A Comparison of USA Today and The New York Times," *Journalism Quarterly,* 67:83-87 (1990); Joe Russonello and Frank Wolf, "Newspaper Coverage of the 1976 and 1968 Presidential Campaigns," *Journalism Quarterly,* 56:360-364, 432 (1979); Robert G. Meadows, "Issues Emphasis and Public Opinion: The Media During the 1972 Presidential Campaign," *American Politics Quarterly,* 4:189 (1975); Bruce H. Westley, *et al.*, "The News Magazines and the 1960 Conventions," *Journalism Quarterly,* 40:525-531, 647 (1963); Guido H. Stempel III, "Prestige Press Meets the Third Party Challenge," *Journalism Quarterly,* 46:701 (1969); Dru Evarts and Guido H. Stempel III, "Coverage of the 1972 Campaign by TV, News Magazines and Major Newspapers," *Journalism Quarterly,* 51:646-648 (1974).

[5] Wayne Wanta, "The Effects of Dominant Photographs: An Agenda Setting Experiment," *Journalism Quarterly,* 63:728-734(1986); Doris Graber, *Processing the News: How People Tame the Information Tide,* 2nd ed. (White Plains, NY, Longman, Inc., 1988), p. 174.

[6] Andrea Gary and Anne Cooper, "U.S. Newsmagazines Cover the Ethiopian Famine, 1983-1986" AEJMC Magazine Division, Boston, 1991; Larry Z. Leslie, "Newspaper Photo Coverage of Censure of McCarthy," *Journalism Quarterly,* 63:850-853 (1986); Kuo-Jen Tsang, "News Photos in Time and Newsweek," *Journalism Quarterly,* 61:578-723 (1984); Roy Blackwood, "The Content of News Photos: Roles Portrayed by Men and Women," *Journalism Quarterly*, 60:710-714 (1983); Michael W. Singletary, "Newspaper Photographs: A Content Analysis, 1936-1976," *Journalism Quarterly*, 55:585-589 (1978).

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[8] Jeffrey Alan John, "Analysis of Visual Reference Associations in Television News Coverage of 1988 U.S. Presidential Election Campaign," AEJMC Visual Communication Division, Minneapolis, 1990.

[9] Sandra W. Moriarty, "Visual Codes and Conventions," AEJMC Visual Communication Division, San Antonio, 1987; Herbert Zettle, *Sight-Sound-Motion: Applied Media Aesthetics* (Belmont, CA.: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 2nd ed., 1990); Keith R. Kenney, "A Method for Studying Bias and Ideology in Journalistic Photographs," unpublished paper, College of Communication Arts and Sciences, Michigan State University, 1990.

[10] Graber, p. 159.

[11] John Durniak, "A Clinton Photo Book for the Home Computer," *Chicago Sun-Times,* January 10, 1993, p. 15, sec. 9.

[12] Roger D. Wimmer and Joseph R. Dominick, *Mass Media Research: An Introduction,* 2nd. ed., (Belmont, CA.: Wadworth Publishing, 1987), p. 186. Authors suggest that the minimum reliability coefficient for Scott's *pi* is .75 or above.

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Self Efficacy, Class, Race,
and
Call-in Political Television Show Use

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April 1, 1993

Running Head: Call-in Political Television

Abstract

A survey examines viewer self efficacy, class, and race, and call-in political television show use prior to the 1992 presidential election. Listening, viewing, and calling were associated with a wide range of other political behaviors, such as donating money and using bumper stickers. However, use of call-in shows was not linked to support for a particular candidate or ideology. Results are discussed in terms of the combination of self efficacy, race, and class as predictors of call-in use. These results are contrasted to national television news viewing and newspaper reading. How psychological variables, such as self efficacy, may play a part in predicting call-in use is considered in terms of the programs' unique interactive quality.

Introduction

Political call-in television programs were the hallmark of the 1992 presidential election. Call-in shows, such as CNN's Larry King Live, helped thrust Texas millionaire Ross Perot into the national political limelight literally over night (Luntz, 1993). So-called electronic town meetings helped propel Bill Clinton into the White House, and defeat George Bush. While the shows have been discussed for their importance to the fate of particular candidates, their emergence as a political form has not been considered in terms of the people who watched, listened, and called in.

Negative advertising set the tone for the 1988 presidential election (see Newhagen & Reeves, 1991). Some political analysts openly speculated that while the negative ads seemed to get their sponsors elected, they were contributing to long term alienation from the political system as a whole (Kern, 1989). This scenario harkened back to Noelle Neumann's bleak model of the relationship between mass media and public opinion (Katz, 1984). According to her theory, media constrain the range of opinion, and mute viewers' willingness to express themselves.

By contrast, the tone of media coverage in 1992 election was one of participation. While call-in television programs are not new to the American media environment, they stand out as the defining feature of election coverage in 1992. This paper examines how three key interrelated concepts, class, race, and political efficacy, can help explain call-in political television use, and differentiate it from other kinds of news media use.

Class and Race as Predictors of Media Use

Virtually all of the nine theoretical attempts to deal with the so-called minimal effects problem in media effects research recognize at least one of the three main indicators of social class, education, income, and profession, as a predictor of media use (see Beniger, 1990). For instance Gerbner and his associates (1985) found education to be an intervening variable in the study of the cultivation effects of television. McCombs and Shaw (1972) found education and income to be associated with newspaper use in their agenda setting research.

A credo of political communication research has been that media use is resource-driven. That is, increases in income allow access to a broader range of media, and therefore a more information-rich environment. However, this trend can lead to a "knowledge gap" between rich and the poor (Tichenor, Donohue, & Olien, 1970). Taking the logic a step further, if race and class are isomorphic, then African Americans as a group would be expected to be especially information poor. However, there is evidence of race-based differences in political participation patterns that transcend class (Shingles, 1981).

Literature into the use of news media for political information, then, suggest two very broad predictions concerning class and race:

H1: Members of the middle class will use informational media information more than the poor. This will be especially true for newspaper use.

H2: African Americans will rely on television news more for information than newspapers.

The first hypothesis gains wide support from a number of minimal effects paradigms, such as agenda setting and knowledge gap. The second prediction can be drawn from research such as Robinson's (1975, 1976) knowledge-based perspective, that classifies people as being either television or newspaper dependent.

One problem in using demographic variables, such as class and race, has to do with their generality. In the case of the two preceding hypotheses, class and race give only coarse accounts of news media use. Grunig and Repper (1992) point out that frequently psychological variables will be nested within variables such as class and race. Rosenberg (1968) warns against contingent associations, driven by extraneous variables, that can go unmeasured. In his seminal text on survey research, he points out that "strictly speaking there are no spurious relationships, there are only spurious interpretations" (p. 28). As will be seen, this especially becomes an issue in predicting call-in political program use. This has to do with the fact this format offers an interactive dimension not present in traditional television news or newspapers, and its use is not predicted by theories driven by class-related variables.

Call-in Television

The call-in television format provides at least a glimpse of an important conceptual change taking place in a rapidly evolving media technology. Up to this point, information flow from mass media has generally been conceptualized as a one way phenomenon. For instance, the assumption that media users have no opportunity for feedback is critical to theories on media effects such as "the spiral of silence" (see Katz, 1984). Chaffee and Mutz (1988) comparison of interpersonal communication and mass media stresses how the two are frequently conceptualized as competing against each other. Interpersonal communication, within this framework, is viewed as more powerful precisely because of the opportunity for feedback.

Truly interactive mass media may be a decade beyond the current horizon, with the technology for digitized television signals riding on fiber optic information highways just now coming of the drawing boards. However, advances in satellite technology already have given call-in television shows, such as Larry King Live and the electronic town halls used in the 1992 election, at least the allusion of directly involving home viewers in two-way communication.

This brings efficacy into the viewership equation in ways that it was not when television was conceptualized as a largely passive experience (see Krugman, 1981). Bandura (1988) states that motivation can be explained by perceived self efficacy and an estimation of goal difficulty. This maps onto call-in media use in terms of an expression of political efficacy as a two-dimensional construct. That is, the motivation to call or listen to political talk shows might be explained in terms of a calculus in which viewers self efficacy and their perception of system efficacy are weighed.

Political efficacy

Perhaps the most salient question to ask about the relationship between individuals and the political system is one of empowerment, or efficacy. The concept was first identified as political efficacy, or "the feeling that individual political action does have, or can have an impact upon the political process, i.e., that it is worth while to preform one's civic duties" (Campbell, Gurin, & Miller, 1954, p. 187). This definition embodies the question "does my vote count?," and focuses on an assessment of the political system more than the individual's ability to cope with it.

But political efficacy so defined fails to explain why, under some circumstances, African Americans are more politically active than whites, despite their higher level of cynicism about the political system (Olsen, 1970). Shingles (1981) conceptualized efficacy as a two-dimensional construct, one internally based and the other system based. System-based efficacy has to do with the perceived capacity of the political process to function, and corresponds more or less to the traditional idea of political efficacy. Internal efficacy, on the other hand, has to do with the individual's sense of being able to cope with the system. Using this construct, Shingles explained that while both races shared low estimates of system efficacy, race consciousness had heightened internal, or self efficacy for some African Americans, which in turn resulted in higher levels of participation.

The Case of Prince George's County. The question of efficacy and race is especially salient in light of 1990 U.S. Census data showing the emergence of middle class African American enclaves in some American suburbs. The 1992 presidential election offered the opportunity to examine political efficacy in what is purportedly the largest middle class African American suburban enclave in the country, Prince George's County, Md. A survey executed prior the 1992 primary elections detected an interaction between self efficacy and media use (Newhagen, 1993). Generally, increased media use is associated with a greater increase in self efficacy for African Americans than it is for whites.

Consideration of efficacy in the context of class and race leads to the following predictions concerning call-in political television use:

H3: Increased self efficacy will be associated with increased viewing and calling of political call-in television shows. To the degree that African Americans are likely to have a high level of self efficacy, call-in use also will be high among this group.

H4: Social class will be less useful as a predictor of call-in program use than it is for traditional news media use, such as watching television news programs or reading newspapers.

Method

A telephone survey was executed in Prince George's County, Maryland, a suburb of Washington D.C., from Sept. 20 to Oct. 6, 1992.

Sample Selection The first stage of sample selection stratified the county by racial mix and household income. That task was accomplished using the 1990 U.S. Census STF1-A database on CD-ROM, and a standard IBM compatible computer. The unit of analysis for the database is the block group, an area roughly equivalent to an eight-square-block neighborhood containing about 2,000 residents.

Block groups were divided into two categories according to race balance, determined by the ratio of whites to blacks.[1] One category included block groups with more whites than blacks, and a second contained block groups with more blacks than whites. Block groups were then categorized as either high income areas or low income areas, using median household income of $44,660 as the break point. This resulted in the creation of four categories:

- High income majority white = 101 block groups
- Low income majority white = 63 block groups
- High income majority black = 53 block groups
- Low income majority black = 91 block groups

Street names and address ranges in each block group were then determined using the U.S. Census Tiger mapping database.

An equal number of telephone exchanges were drawn randomly from each race-class category using a street address-based telephone directory (see Haines & Co., 1990).

Instrument Construction The survey instrument was constructed to include sections addressing self efficacy, system efficacy, political leader trust, media use, and general respondent demographic information. Efficacy and trust questions were selected from the pilot 1987 National Election Study (see Craig, Niemi, & Silver, 1990).[2] Leader trust questions were included to enhance comparisons with the 1987 NES pilot.[3] Media use questions were based on the format employed by in the 1989 NES pilot study (see Price, 1989).[4] Respondents were asked if they listened to political talk shows on radio and on television, and if they called in to such shows. They also were asked if they learned from listening to the shows. Additionally, a respondents were asked a series of questions about their political participation, such as using bumper sticker, and donating money to political causes.

Instrument Execution. Due to the telephone number preselection process, most of the telephone numbers contacted corresponded to actual working residential exchanges, and the response rate for the survey was 78 percent. Analysis of variance shows that the actual sample from each of the four sub-groups differed in the intended direction for income, $F(3,368)=12.04$, $p<.001$, and education, $F(3,397)=3.24$, $p<.02$, as did chi-square analysis for race, chi-square $(3, N=403)=84.3$, $p<.001$.

Results

The first step in the analysis was to combine variables related to the similar concepts into indexes.

Efficacy and Trust Indexes. Table 1 shows that factor analysis of efficacy and trust questions generated a three-factor solution, much like that found in the analysis of the 1987 NES study (see Craig, Niemi, & Silver, 1990). Variables were standardized and three indexes were constructed, weighting variables with factor loadings greater than .30, one for self efficacy, one for system efficacy, and one for leader trust.

Place Table 1 About Here

Call-in Indexes. Table 2 shows that factor analysis of questions related to call-in political shows generated a three-factor solution. Variables were standardized and indexes were constructed, weighting variables with factor loadings greater than .30. The first factor appeared most interesting to this study, and describes active listeners and callers who say they learn from political talk shows. Neither of the two remaining factors loaded on calling or listening.

Place Table 2 About Here

Active Callers. The active caller index is correlated to a number of other political behaviors, including contributing money to political candidates, r=.22, p<.001, using political bumper stickers or lawn sign, r=.17, p<.001, and talking with others about politics, r=.25, p<.001. It also is correlated to news media use, including watching local news, r=.14, p<.004, watching national news, r=.18, p<.001, listening to radio news, r=.22, p<.001, and reading newspapers, r=.13, p<.008.

Active calling is not, however, associated with the respondent's assessment of their economic condition, ideology, candidate choice, or political party.

Logistic regression is used to assess the effects of the efficacy-leader trust indexes on calling in to political television shows. Table three shows that the self efficacy index has a large regression coefficient relative to standard error (Coefficient/Std. Error = -.3.94), while system efficacy and leader trust do not. This indicates that respondents with high self efficacy scores are more likely to report calling in to television call-in political shows, such as Larry King Live, than respondents with low self efficacy scores.

Place Table 3 About Here

Race, Class, and Self Efficacy

Hierarchical regression can be used to test the differential effects of variables by removing their variance from a specified model one block at a time. Television news watching, newspaper reading, and call-in index scores are used as dependent variables. As independent variables, the effects of class, measured by income, education, and profession, are first tested as a block, followed by a dummy variable for race, and finally respondent self efficacy index score.

Television News Viewing. Table 4 shows the television news viewing model to be statistically significant, $F(5,351)=4.76$, $p<.001$. First, education, income, and profession are added as a block, and account for two percent of total variance. Then a dummy variable representing race is added, but explains no additional variance. Finally, the self efficacy index is added, and accounts for an additional four percent of total variance.

Place Table 4 About Here

Taking into account the direction of the scales, beta values indicate that as income increases and education decreases, national television viewing increases. Further, race does not predict national television viewing after the effects of class are removed. However, increases in self efficacy do predict national television viewing, when the effects of both class and race are removed.

Newspaper Reading. Table 5 shows the newspaper reading model to be statistically significant, $F(5,351)=9.42$, $p<.001$. First, education, income, and profession account for eight percent of total variance. When a dummy variable representing race is added, no additional variance is explained. Finally, the self efficacy index is added, and accounts for an additional four percent of total variance.

Place Table 5 About Here

Taking into account the direction of the scales, beta values indicate that as income increases, newspaper reading increases. Further, race does not predict newspaper reading when the effects of class are removed. Finally, increases in self efficacy do predict newspaper reading, even after the effects of both class and race are removed.

These two models support Hypothesis 1, that class will predict traditional news media use. The idea that income and newspaper use are associated is particularly well supported. Hypothesis 2, predicting race differences will be seen between television news viewing and newspaper reading, is not supported when the effects of class are removed.

Call-in Index Scores. Table 6 shows the call-in index score model to be statistically significant, $\underline{F}(5,338)=10.02$, $\underline{p}<.001$. First, education, income, and profession account for one percent of total variance. Then a dummy variable representing race explains an additional six percent of variance. Finally, the self efficacy index accounts for an additional six percent of total variance.

Place Table 6 About Here

Taking into account the direction of the scales, beta values indicate that class indicators do not predicate call-in index scores. However, blacks have higher call-in scores than whites, with the effects of class removed. Finally, increased self efficacy predicts call-in index scores, with the effects of both race and class removed.

This model supports Hypothesis 3, predicting self efficacy and race as predictors of call-in use. Further, results support Hypothesis 4, that class is less useful as a predictor of call-in program use than it is for traditional news media use.

Figure 1 summarizes results from all three hierarchical regression models. The two salient features of those relationships are; the importance of race and self efficacy to call-in use, and the importance of class to newspaper use.

Place Figure 1 About Here

Call-in Index Scores, Race and Class. Using the analysis of variance statistic, Figure 2 shows an interaction between race and class for the active call-in index, when the linear effects of leader trust are removed, _F_(1,2,378)= 3.49, _p_<.016. Middle class whites score at about the same level (_M_=.012) as poor whites (_M_=.007). However, middle class blacks show the highest level of any groups (_M_=.022), and poor blacks the lowest level (_M_=.002).

Place Figure 2 About Here

This last analysis emphasizes results from the regression models. Middle class blacks particularly stand out in this regard, and show a complex relationship between self efficacy and other demographic variables. High self efficacy is to be expected as a main effect for members of the middle class, as well as for certain African American subpopulations. However, the significant interaction between race and class indicates being a member of the black middle class is associated with especially high self efficacy, which in turn is reflected in active call-in use.

Discussion

The 1992 Presidential election saw the rise of the political call-in show to prominence as the defining feature of the media environment. Political analysts wrote off the phenomenon as a tactical maneuver on the part of candidates like Texas millionaire Ross Perot to circumvent the scrutiny of the press. Little attention was given, however, to the idea that the shows represent the beginning of a true revolution in mass media, namely interactive television.

Production techniques, such as careful call screening and time limitations might only have given the viewer the appearance of true interaction. Nevertheless, the call-in program clearly opened the door to an important shift in the way television is conceptualized. Communications scholars have been thinking about how psychological differences in viewers might affect their media use for 40 years (see Blumler & Katz, 1974). However, that discussion may have been stifled, at least in part, by the conceptualization of television as a one way medium. Technological advances in the digitization of information, embodied by the integration of computer technology, fiber optic transmission, and high definition television may mark the dawn of a new interactive age, and reconceptualization of television as a two-way medium.

One way to interpret the results of this study in that regard is to think about what does predict call-in program use and what does not.

Thing that Do Not Predict Call-in Use. Social class, a traditionally strong indicator of news media use, did less well in predicting call-in use. Neither is race a strong indicator of either television news viewing or newspaper reading, when the effects of class are removed.

Further, while certain candidates success was attributed to their adroit use of this medium, this study found no evidence linking call-in use to either candidate preference or ideology. Neither did system efficacy or leader trust vary with call-in use. In fact these two indicators appeared to be acting as constants, low across all levels, regardless of outcome variable.

Things that Do Predict Call-in Use. This study shows self efficacy and race to be particularly good indicators of call-in use. These results are especially interesting regarding middle class African Americans, who seem whose media use seems to be determined by more than just the independent effects of either race or class.

The technology underlying television has changed little since its diffusion through American society in the 1950s and 1960s. The only real change has been the addition of color images. However, dramatic advances in the fusion of computer and video technology are now in testing labs and on the consumer's horizon with the decade. Time may prove the importance of call-in talk shows to be no more than anecdotal in the understanding of television and political communication. The rise in importance of the shows during 1992 may, however, harken important technological changes in the media that call on researcher to radically reconceptualize the effects of the medium. Consideration of a new set of viewer-based psychological variables, such as self efficacy, will be part of that reconceptualization. In many respects, those variable underlie the frustration of minimal effects researchers.

There are two alternative explanations for the minimal effects problem in communication research. One suggests that mass media simply do not have the strong effects that seem so intuitively appealing to professional and researcher alike. An alternative view holds that researchers simply have not been able to capture the true effects of mass media. Time may show one reason this second alternative is correct has to do with the fact that our theories about mass media effects have simply preceded the technological capacity to deliver them. The dawn of interactive television, reflected in the popularity of call-in political television, may be a harbinger of the future of communication research.

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Figure Caption

Figure 1. Medium Use Variance Explained (R^2) by Class, Race, and Self Efficacy Index Scores.

Figure Caption

Figure 2. Class, Race, and Call-in Index Score.

Endnotes

1. Of the 342 block groups in Prince George's County, 50 were eliminated from the analysis because the population was either very small, or because of heavy concentrations of non-resident students living in dorms at the University of Maryland -- College Park.

2. The self efficacy questions included: I consider myself well-qualified to participate in politics; I feel that I have a pretty good understanding of the important political issues facing our country; I feel that I could do as good a job in public office as most other people; and, I often don't feel sure of myself when talking with other people about politics and government. The scale used for self efficacy questions was: Agree strongly, Agree somewhat, Disagree somewhat, Disagree strongly.

The system efficacy questions included: There are many legal ways for citizens to successfully influence what the government does; Under our form of government, the people have the final say about how the country is run, no matter who is in office; If public officials are not interested in hearing what the people think, there is really no way to make them listen; People like me don't have any say about what the government does. The scale used for system efficacy questions was: Agree strongly, Agree somewhat, Disagree somewhat, Disagree strongly.

3. The political leader trust questions included: When government leaders make statements to the American people on television or in the newspapers, how often do you think they are telling the truth? Do you think the people we elect to public office usually try to keep the promises they have made during the election? Do you think that most public officials can be trusted to do what is right without our having to constantly check on them? The scale used for the trust in political leader questions was: Just about always, Most of the time, Only some of the time.

4. The media use questions included: Think back how many days in the last week did you watch night time entertainment programs like comedies or drama? How many days in the last week did you watch morning news programs like "Good Morning America," or "Today"? How many days in the last week did you watch local news broadcast, that is programs that mainly cover news that occurs in you state and local community? How many days in the last week did you watch national news broadcasts, like the ABC news with Peter Jennings, CBS with Dan Rather, NBC with Tom Browkaw, or CNN? Think back how many days in the last week did you listen to talk radio programs, where people call in to talk about public issues? How many days in the last week did you listen to short news summaries, usually five minute or so, that are broadcast in

between music or other regular programs? Think back how many days in the last week did you read a *daily* newspaper?

Table 1
Factor Analysis of Efficacy and Trust

	Factor Loading[1]		
Variable	Self Efficacy	System Efficacy	Leader Trust
I am qualified	.782	----	----
I understand issues	.703	----	----
I could do a good job	.721	----	----
I don't feel sure of myself	-.707	----	----
There are legal ways	----	.725	----
People have final say	----	.545	----
Officials don't hear	----	.609	----
I don't have a say	----	-.788	----
Leaders lie	----	----	.772
Leaders break promises	----	----	.823
Leaders can't be trusted	----	----	.639
Percent Variance Explained	22.5	19.5	11.9
Eigenvalue	2.47	2.14	1.30

---

[1] Factor loadings above .30 are reported

Table 2
Factor Analysis of Call-in Radio and Television

	Factor Loading[1]		
Variable	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
Watch programs like Larry King	.606	----	----
Listen to talk Radio	.753	----	----
I call in to talk shows	.602	----	----
Callers are a lot like me	----	-.808	----
Caller know what they are talking about	----	.801	----
I learn when I listen	.454	.344	-.388
Politicians are more candid on talk shows	----	----	.876
Percent Variance Explained	25.7	17.2	14.9
Eigenvalue	1.80	1.20	1.04

---

[1] Factor loadings above .30 are reported

Table 3

Calling Political Talk Shows, Self Efficacy, System Efficacy, and Leader Trust

Logistic Regression (N=370)

Variable	Regression Coefficient	Standard Error	Coefficient/ Std. Error
Self Efficay	-.625	.158	-3.94
System Efficacy	-.168	.166	-1.01
Leader Trust	.024	.103	.23

Table 4

National Television News Viewing, Self Efficacy, Class, and Race

Hierarchical Regression (N=356)

Variables entered and step number	Beta[a]	R^2	R^2 increment
1. Education	-.107	.02	.02*
Income	.129		
Profession	-.022		
2. Race	-.006	.00	.00
3. Self efficacy	-.211	.04	.06***

* p<.05 ** p<.01 *** p<.001

---

[a] Beta coefficient for variable at final step.

Table 5

Newspaper Reading, Self Efficacy, Class, and Race

Hierarchical Regression (N=356)

Variables entered and step number	Beta[a]	R^2	R^2 increment
1. Education	.027	.08	.08***
Income	.161		
Profession	-.059		
2. Race	.065	.08	.00
3. Self efficacy	-.210	.12	.04***

* $p<.05$ ** $p<.01$ *** $p<.001$

---

[a] Beta coefficient for variable at final step.

Table 6

Active Calling, Self Efficacy, Class, and Race

Hierarchical Regression (N=343)

Variables entered and step number	Beta[a]	R^2	R^2 increment
1. Education	-.006	.01	.01
Income	-.155		
Profession	.063		
2. Race	-.222	.07	.06***
3. Self efficacy	-.248	.13	.06***

* p<.05 ** p<.01 *** p<.001

---

[a] Beta coefficient for variable at final step.

Fig. 1

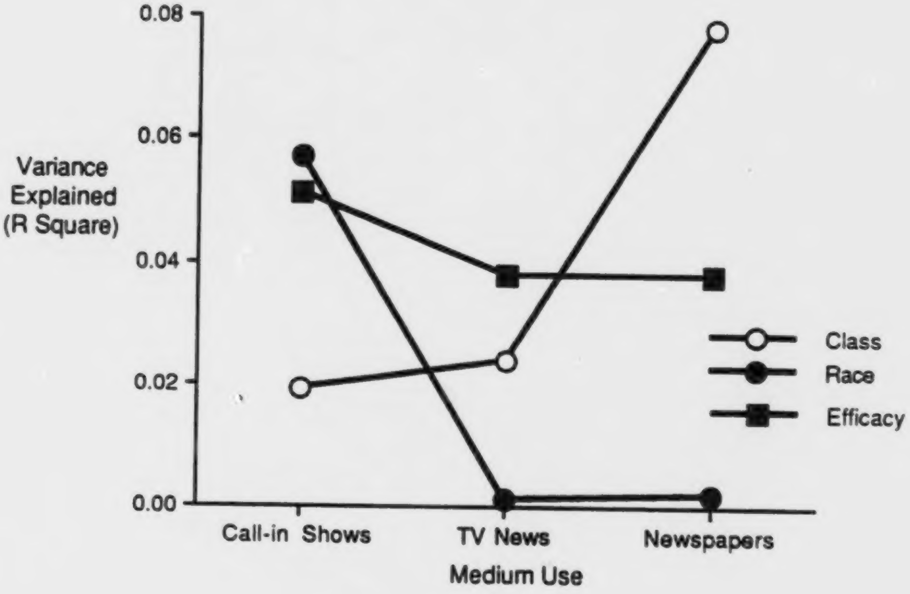
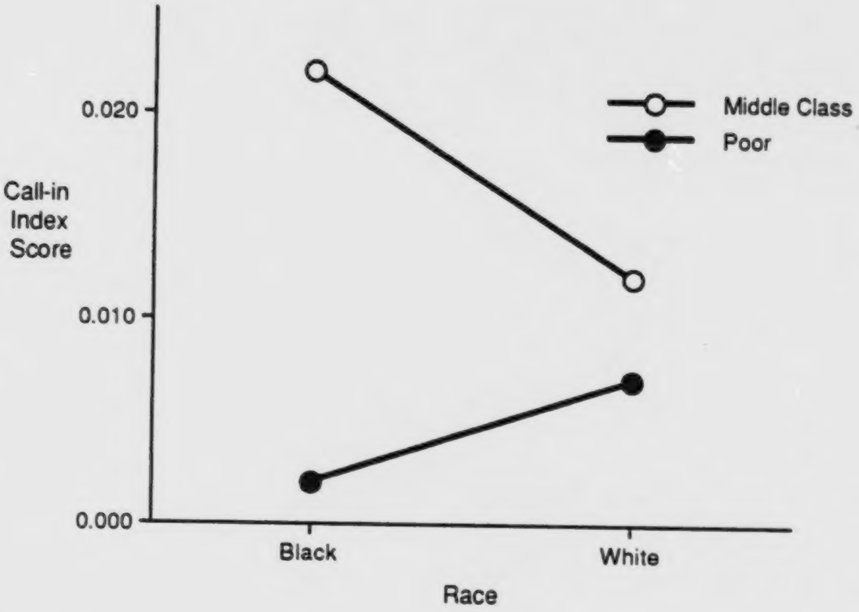

0.08
0.06
0.04
0.02
0.00
Variance Explained (R Square)
Call-in Shows
TV News
Newspapers
Medium Use
Class
Race
Efficacy

Fig. 2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TALK SHOW POLITICS:

THE MATCH THAT REKINDLES AMERICAN DEMOCRACY?

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Student paper presented to the Theory and Methodology Division for the A.E.J. Annual Convention in Kansas City, August 1993.

Excuse me, George Herbert irregular-heart-beating, read my lipping, slipping in the polls, do-nothing, deficit-raising, make-less-money-than-Millie-the-White-House-dog-last-year, Quayle-loving, sushi-puking Bush! I don't remember inviting your ass to my show.

--Arsenio Hall, June 1992, after the White House announced that President Bush might appear on some of the talk shows, but would not appear on the "Arsenio Hall Show."

Tonight's guests are actress Geena Davis, musician Jackson Browne, Darren Burrows from "Northern Exposure," and... no presidential candidates!

--Jay Leno, host of "The Tonight Show," July 1992

The latest development in the evolution of political communication may have occurred on the evening of February 20, 1992 when Texas billionaire H. Ross Perot announced his candidacy for president during the "Larry King Live" show on CNN. Perot had chosen King's interview and call-in show to make his announcement, thus "bypassing" more traditional news venues like press conferences. Nevertheless, the result was the same; the news was immediately picked up by the mainstream media and Perot's picture was on the front page of the morning papers.

Other presidential candidates soon followed this path toward the "alternative media" and around and through the "traditional media," appearing with everyone from Larry King to Phil Donahue to Arsenio Hall. This phenomenon has been dubbed everything from "talk show democracy" to "new news" to "the idiot culture." Regardless of its name, talk show politics by the media and by the presidential candidates transformed the '92 Campaign. Whether that transformation has had a positive or negative effect upon the democratic process is the focus of this paper.

NEW NORMATIVE STANDARDS FOR A NEW MEDIUM

The media's role in the democratic process has often been one where practice rarely follows ideals or theory. Nevertheless, the underlying framework of the American media is thought to be based upon democratic principles such as acting on behalf of citizens as watchdogs of politicians and political institutions (Gurevitch and Blumler, 1990). As McQuail (1991:70) has noted, normative theory is important because the media

> carry out some essential tasks for the wider benefit of society.... [They] do serve the 'public interest' or 'general welfare', whether by design or chance....[In] democratic societies the media should do or not do some particular thing, for reasons of wider or longer term benefit to society.

Gurevitch and Blumler (1990:270) have identified eight normative standards for the media in democratic societies:

1. Surveillance of the sociopolitical environment, reporting developments likely to impinge, positively or

negatively, on the welfare of citizens.

2. Meaningful agenda setting, identifying the key issues of the day, including the forces that have formed and may resolve them.

3. Platforms for an intelligible and illuminating advocacy by politicians and spokespersons of other causes and interest groups.

4. Dialogue across a diverse range of views, as well as between power holders (actual and prospective) and mass publics.

5. Mechanisms for holding officials to account for how they have exercised power.

6. Incentives for citizens to learn, choose, and become involved, rather than merely to follow and kibitz over the political process.

7. A principled resistance to the efforts of forces outside the media to subvert their independence, integrity, and ability to serve the audience.

8. A sense of respect for the audience member, as potentially concerned and able to make sense of his or her political environment.

I suggest that the effects of talk show politics on both the media and the candidates have caused a dichotomy in Blumler and Gurevitch's set of normative standards. Their standards are extremely useful benchmarks that can usually be used to assess the traditional media. The problem arises when trying to apply them to this new medium of talk shows during an election campaign. Part-news and part-entertainment, this medium has its own norms and principles--many of which no longer seem to apply to the traditional media.

Traditional media are explicated here as television news, specifically the nightly network news, news magazines such as "60 Minutes," Sunday interview programs such as "Face the Nation," and discussion programs such as "The McLaughlin Group." My explication of talk shows is a somewhat broader and inclusive list. These include interview and call-in shows such as "Larry King Live," "The Arsenio Hall Show," "Donahue," and MTV's "Rock the Vote," as well as the network's morning programs like "Today" and "Good Morning America." As Taylor (1992) has described it, the talk show programs are "hodgepodge...a mix of the serious, the slightly bizarre, and the *au courant.*"

This dichotomy of Gurevitch and Blumler's normative standards occurs between the traditional media and the talk shows. It may be helpful to conceptualize these norms as specific to an election campaign to better understand how the talk shows have usurped several of the standards from the traditional media. Figure 1 illustrates how talk shows are able to greatly involve the public in a dialogue with the candidates in a way that traditional media does not. In the '92 Campaign (and potentially in the future) talk shows have better fulfilled expectations regarding dialogues between the public and candidates through numerous call-in programs that allow direct access to the candidates by the mass public. Although traditional media do involve the public in occasional dialogues (e.g. "town hall" programs where audience members can address questions to a panel of guests), talk shows have gone far beyond traditional interactive forums.

INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE

AN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON A "NEW" PHENOMENON

Is talk show politics really something new? There are several historical examples of presidential candidates and presidents using a non-traditional news medium to reach the public directly and unmediated. Barber (1980) argues that Teddy Roosevelt could not have won the election of 1900 without the support of the editors of the "penny press," tabloid newspapers that were the anti-establishment medium of their time. Politicians also used "The Saturday Evening Post," the most important magazine of its time, to bypass reporters and reach out directly to the public. Barber notes that Roosevelt, William Howard Taft, Warren G. Harding, and Woodrow Wilson all wrote monographs for "The Saturday Evening Post."

As technology evolved from print to radio, the candidates followed along. Winfield (1990) suggests that Franklin Delano Roosevelt's "fireside chats" were successful for two reasons: (1) radio had eclipsed newspapers in its ability to reach the largest possible audience, and (2) Roosevelt could say exactly what he wanted without journalists' interpretations. The effectiveness of this approach was less in simply using the radio as a new medium, but rather in using a medium that would allow unfiltered communication to reach a mass audience. When television eclipsed radio in its ability to reach a mass audience, politicians turned to it as the new mode of communication.

The "Today" show debuted in 1952 and was the first of many television programs to blur the lines between news and entertainment programming, even though many of its hosts have been news veterans like Tom Brokaw and Edwin Newman (Smillie, 1992). In the late 1950's Robert Kennedy appeared with Jack Paar on "The Tonight Show" to criticize Jimmy Hoffa and generated an enormous volume of mail from viewers to Capitol Hill. The St. Louis Post-Dispatch wrote in an editorial:

> It may be that Jack Paar will exert a deeper direct effect on Congress than President Eisenhower, who has come out again for a strong Labor reform bill (Smillie, 1992:19).

During the 1976 presidential campaign there were six 30-minute television specials featuring President Gerald Ford being interviewed by "Today" show host Joe Garagiola, an ardent Republican. This gave the president an opportunity to appear in a relaxed and informal setting with an interviewer, Garagiola, who was "Johnny [Carson] - and - Merv

[Griffin] - and Dinah [Shore] combined in a talk show set up with the president as guest star" (Schram, 1977).

Other notable examples of using a non-traditional news medium during an election campaign include President Carter's interview in the September 1976 issue of Playboy magazine, and Sen. Gary Hart's and the Rev. Jesse Jackson's appearances on "Saturday Night Live." Seen from this historical perspective, candidate appearances on Phil Donahue and Aresnio Hall may be seen as simply the next step in this continuing political and media evolution toward greater public dialogue and exposure in non-traditional news media.

THE RISE OF TALK SHOWS IN THE '92 CAMPAIGN

While the political strategists have been explaining that their candidate's talk show appearances are just good strategy and a better way to reach voters, people like Marvin Kalb, among others, have described this new phenomenon as "revolutionary." It is not simply the numerous appearances by candidates on these programs [Clinton and Perot together made over 30 talk show appearances between January and June, 1992 (Smillie, 1992)], but a combination of caller and interviewer questions that has helped to create a new style of campaign discourse. All of this was nearly unimaginable several years ago. Baker (1992) has said, "Nobody foresaw the amazing change that presidential politics has undergone. Only a wizard with the taste for the macabre could have predicted that the great age of image politics would end with the presidential campaign turning into a TV talk show." One measure of this change is that Phil Donahue tried in 1984 and 1988 to book the presidential candidates on his show; by 1992 Perot and Clinton each made several appearances on "Donahue".

Several explanations are suggested for the rise of talk show politics. One reason is that the traditional media have been losing viewers in recent years while the talk shows (and cable television) have been gaining viewers. In January 1992 the combined ratings of the three networks' nightly newscasts reached their lowest point since 1961. The percentage of all viewers who actually had their television sets on and who watched the news (the audience share) was 56 percent. This compares to the nightly news' highest share in 1980 of 76 percent (Kolbert, 1992).

While there are no combined figures available for the audience share of talk shows, the growth in cable television may provide an indicator of growing interest in non-network news and entertainment. During the 1980s cable television subscriptions grew rapidly from 17 million subscribers in 1981 to 47 million by 1989 (Smillie, 1992). Today cable reaches almost 60 percent of American households (Kolbert, 1992). Professor Gerald Popkin has said, "If the network news had held the same central, dominant position in American culture as it did in 1972, you would not be seeing people spending as much time on talk shows" (Kolbert, 1992).

An important aspect of this explanation is the fact that the candidates appearances on talk shows have had high ratings. Perot's two hour appearance on the "Today" show drew a 4.9 Nielson rating for the first hour and a 5.3 rating for the second hour. These ratings were well above its 3.8 average and tied the high ratings during coverage of the L.A. Riots and the Gulf War (Taylor, 1992). If the ratings had not been so high, it is plausible that "Today" would not have invited Perot back or the other candidates to appear.

A second explanation for the emergence of the talk shows is that it allows the candidate a greater length of time to present an unfiltered message to the voters. Candidates in past elections have been able to count on extensive coverage of their campaign rhetoric and stump speeches by the network news to get their message to the voters. In recent years, however, this type of unmediated coverage has been in decline. Not only have the total minutes devoted to coverage of the presidential campaign in the networks' nightly newscasts declined from 1988 to 1992, but so have the length (less than eight seconds) and frequency of candidate sound bites. The Center for Media and Public Affairs found that in 1968 the average sound bite for a presidential candidate was 42 seconds. By 1988 it had decreased to 9.8 seconds and in the first six months of 1992 had dropped to 7.3 seconds. Similarly, Hallin (1992) has found that sound bites comprised only 5.7 percent of the 1988 television election coverage, compared to 17.6 percent in 1968. Robert Lichter of the CMPA has said, "What these figures show is that the message is getting more and more mediated. The candidates can only get snippets on the air, and it is frustrating to them and to the electorate" (Taylor, 1992).

A third explanation is that the great success of the talk shows is part of the public's growing dissatisfaction with traditional media. Columnist William Greider has suggested that "the public has come to resent 'elite' media coverage of 'elite' politicians in an election year when voters are in an anti-establishment mood" (Smillie, 1992). During an election year in which one of the key slogans of the Clinton campaign was "change," it does not seem so surprising that the public would also want to change its use of the media. As Kalb (1992) sees it, "Most people have invidiously been linking the old media with the old politics -- and in their minds, both be damned." Harsh critiques of the media's performance also emerged from journalists themselves. Anthony Lewis of the New York Times said, "The American press prides itself on its courage, its selflessness, its influence. But in the current campaign those claims sound like a bad joke. The press is distinguished by its cynicism and its self-regard. Yes, it does have influence -- for the worse" (Rosen, 1992).

EFFECTS OF TALK SHOWS: A NEW MODEL

The talk show format can be seen to have different effects on the media, the candidates, the public, and ultimately, democracy. Figure 2 illustrates this model and lists some of the important effects. These effects, however, are not unidirectional; an antecedent for one effect may also be the consequence of another effect. In addition, causal linkages may be drawn both vertically and horizontally among the cells. This list of effects does not intend to be exhaustive, but merely serve as a guide for better understanding across levels of analysis.

- - - - - - - - - - - - - -

INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE

- - - - - - - - - - - - - -

Different Shows, Different Audiences

As talk shows are reaching a larger audience than traditional media (as discussed above), they are also reaching a different audience. These are people who do not watch traditional media and appear to be more alienated from the political process. One theory during the '92 Campaign was that the candidate who could best connect with these alienated voters would collect their votes on election day. As Michael Deaver, a former Reagan aide, has said, "Talk radio and talk television are a phenomenal thing that's happened to the disenfranchised in this country. The other channels have been closed off to them. It's like a flow of water that gets damned up and finds another way to go" (Kolbert, 1992a). Although the traditional media is beginning to feel uncomfortable about losing their monopoly on the candidates' appearances, the potential to reach disenfranchised voters is seen as one of the most positive effects of talk show politics. Tim Russert, moderator of

NBC's "Meet the Press," has said, "Obviously [talk shows] generated an enormous amount of interest by people who normally weren't turned on by the process" (Kolbert, 1992b).

Candidates Gain Control of the Process

With the rise of the talk shows, there is an important realignment in who controls the political agenda. Alter (1992:12) has said, "Regardless of whether the national media's loss of control of the political agenda is good for America, it's clearly not good for the national media, which are floundering perhaps more than ever." Talk shows allow candidates greater control of this medium. First, the candidates see their appearances on the talk shows as opportunities to attract support in the polls; therefore, they may only feel they need to appear on talk shows when they are behind in the race. An example is President Bush's decision to sit out any talk show appearances until his campaign thought it would be to his benefit. Talk show politics may ultimately have the greatest benefit for the political underdog if an incumbent does not wish to face questioning by the electorate.

Second, talk shows can be seen as another example of "the growing obsolescence" of the traditional campaign that was focused on winning the support of the political party before the support of the people. Candidates control the process by bypassing the traditional media and the political party and going directly to the viewers via the talk shows.

Krauthammer (1992), among others, sees this as a bad development: "It signifies a geological change in American politics: the growing obsolescence of the great institutions -- the political parties, the Establishment media, the Congress -- that have traditionally stood between the governors and the governed." An example of this is the candidacy of Ross Perot. Sans political office, sans political party, sans everything except money, Perot led the way in the '92 Campaign by using the talk shows to appeal directly to the public.

Candidate Style Over Substance

Does the new talk show politics require a different type of candidate? Talk shows clearly require a candidate to be able to think on his or her feet. They no longer have to speak in sound bites -- which may be good for some candidates and bad for others. Styles need to adjust in this new format; it takes one personality to give an effective stump speech, but another to cozy up on the couch next to Arsenio. Perot's folksy answers and colloquialisms seem made for the format. After his saxophone performance, Clinton's appearances were somewhat predictable, but "compared with Bush in his stilted performance on 'CBS This Morning' [Bush's first talk show appearance], Clinton looked like Bart Simpson" (Zoglin, 1992).

Talk Shows Yield Multiple Exposures and Savings

Whether their appearances on talk shows received good or bad reviews, an important point is that they did receive reviews. Appearances on talk shows not only received high ratings, but the attention of the traditional media. After Clinton played his saxophone on the "Arsenio Hall Show," stories of his appearance were on the front page of the next day's newspaper and on the networks' nightly newscasts. As the campaign went on, newspapers like the New York Times, Washington Post, and others began running almost daily "Candidate on Television" boxes that informed their readers of the candidates' talk show appearances (Taylor, 1992). Professor Darrell West has said that the key to these appearances is not simply the high ratings, but the ability to reach potential voters:

> The fact that [traditional media] are writing about it is the reason [the candidates] are doing it. When you appear on the conventional news shows, there's a high probability that the people in the audience are voters. With the less conventional shows, the likelihood of voting goes way down. So it's not worth it, in and of itself. But the payoff is if Bill Clinton is able to generate stories that he's trying new forums, new ideas (Kolbert, 1992c).

Not only do talk show appearances generate multiple media coverage, but they are also extremely cost effective for the candidates. In early June, 1992 Clinton purchased an expensive half-hour of prime-time television on NBC in the 8:00-8:30 time slot to answer questions from a studio audience. By late June, however, Clinton had received so many invitations to appear on talk shows that his campaign cancelled plans for purchasing a second half-hour of prime-time television (Taylor, 1992). This was a substantial financial savings for the Clinton campaign. George Stephanopoulos, Clinton's deputy campaign manager, said at the time, "If you gave me $3 million today, I wouldn't spend a penny on TV. We can't get any more [exposure] than we are getting" (Iffill, 1992).

Public Gains Greater Access to Candidates

The talk shows allow the public to see the candidates in a live (or unedited) appearance that is predominantly unfiltered by journalists. The public can now hear the candidates give complete answers to questions, not just tiny sound bites. Previously, the ability for people to see and listen to candidates has been limited to news stories reported by the media, press conferences, actual campaign appearances or rallies that people may attend. Talk shows give a greater number of the public a unique opportunity to hear the candidates speak directly. By allowing viewers to see candidates in a more relaxed, informal setting on talk shows, the role of the presidential candidate (and future president) becomes de-mystified. No longer does the candidate simply give stump speeches, shake hands, and kiss babies on the campaign trail. The personality and issues of the candidate can now be seen and heard in the more intimate setting of one's own living room.

Perot Supporters and Talk Shows

The rise of the talk shows was concurrent with the candidacy of Ross Perot and popular theories linked these phenomena together. How closely were they related? McLeod et al. (1993) found a positive association between watching talk shows and positive affect for all three candidates, but the strongest correlation for Perot supporters. Perot supporters were also found to have high interest in the election campaign, but lacked any general political interest or party affiliation. They were among the politically disenfranchised that watched talk shows.

Different Questions, But Not Necessarily Better

The public not only can watch a relaxed candidate in their living rooms, they can also pick up the phone and talk directly to the candidate. By opening the questioning to the public, television has adopted the successful formula used by talk radio shows. The public can now hear complete answers, not just sound bites, although the potential is there for candidates to stick with their prepared answers.

One criticism of call-in questions has been that the public's questions are not of timely issues, are less confrontational, and do not allow for follow-up. Professor

Larry Sabato has described it this way: "The average voter asking political questions is like the blind leading the evasive" (Berke, 1992). Bill Moyers fears that "public discourse has become the verbal equivalent of mud wrestling" (Katz, 1992). Another criticism is that citizen questions are too concerned with their own self-interests. Professor Michael Robinson has complained: "There is nothing more self-centered than an audience of untrained voters who ask the same question: me, me, me" (Kolbert, 1992b). Overall, these critics say the "call-in shows are a field of dreams for the candidates, filled with softball questions" (Taylor, 1992).

Journalists Jeff Greenfield, Michael Kinsley, and Ken Auletta have taken the opposite position and suggested that the call-in questions are actually better than the questions asked by reporters. Kinsley suggests that professional journalists are not looking for either insights or information, they are instead looking for a lead and are "obsessed with process, while the amateurs are obsessed with substance" (Kinsley, 1992). Kinsley makes his point by juxtaposing questions asked of President Bush during a June 4 evening news conferences and questions asked of Perot by viewers calling-in to the "Today" show one week later. The first five questions by the journalists to Bush were:

1) Will you debate Ross Perot in the fall campaign?
2) Is it proper for a man like Perot to use his wealth to run for president, and is Perot an insider or an outsider?

3) Do the opinion polls reflect a rejection of your message?

4) Do you agree with Dan Quayle that Perot was wrong in opposing the Gulf War?

5) If you're re-elected, will you submit a balanced budget in 1994?

The first five questions asked by the public to Perot were:

1) When are you planning to declare your candidacy officially?

2) Are you pro-choice or pro-life?

3) What would you do as president to put unemployed Americans back to work?

4) What are your views on farm policy, especially concerning dairy farms?

5) Would you raise taxes to balance the budget? (Kinsley, 1992).

It is clear from these two lists that the public's questions are more concerned with issue positions than with political maneuvering. Does that, however, make the public's questions better than the journalists? While the public has demonstrated that it can ask questions on issues, there is more to know about candidates than just their stands on issues X, Y, and Z. There is little utility in asking an incumbent president his position on abortion or farm policy. Unlike the general public, journalists have the skill and experience to follow-up and probe candidates who may attempt to duck questions. Journalists also have the time, money, and resources to investigate information and allegations about candidates.

Criticism has also been aimed at the "new journalists" of the talk shows, the interviewers. As candidates make greater use of talk shows, reporters and journalists are being bypassed by the candidates and replaced by interviewers who chat with future presidents as easily as they do with the celebrity of the week. Larry King has become the most well known of the talk show interviewers, as well as receiving the most criticism for his "softball" style of questioning. The criticism against King and his fellow journalists is three-fold. The first charge is that their Mr. Nice-Guy technique is not tough enough or skeptical enough. Second, because they have this easy-going reputation, candidates are purposely avoiding the tougher questioning of traditional journalists. Finally, the candidates "are exploiting the talk shows' available, friendly microphones" to avoid having to appear on more traditional news interview programs like "Face the Nation" (Hoffman, 1992).

King acquired national prominence after Perot announced his candidacy on King's show in February 1992. After appearing on NBC's "Meet the Press," Perot backed off the public affairs program circuit and appeared primarily with King before launching his own 30 and 60-minute infomercials. Perot has said that he preferred King because

> Larry asks penetrating, direct questions in a non-hostile manner. He asks the questions that are on

> the minds of the American people, which keeps the show moving in a very warm, but disciplined way (Hoffman, 1992).

While occasionally making news from a discussion during the interview, the talk show hosts are primarily interested in entertaining their audience, not in being traditional journalists. As Larry King has said,

> Because of all that's happened this year, people are putting on me a newsman's label. I've never been a newsman. I would never want to be a newsman. I've never covered a news event. I'm not interested in, let's say, the Sam Donaldson kind of question. I love Sam. Sam's terrific. But I never saw him ask about feelings. I'm an interviewer, and what I'm interested in is not what a newsman is interested in (Kasindorf, 1992).

EFFECTS ON DEMOCRACY

The most important dimension of talk show politics may be its effects on the democratic process. Can there be any long-term effects beyond the '92 Campaign, or was this merely a transient phenomenon? Some have suggested that talk show politics was a contributory factor to the rise in voter turnout in the '92 election. MTV alone claims that more than 750,000 young people registered to vote for the first time through their "Rock the Vote" campaign. Yet as Inglehart (1992) and others have noted, voting turnout is not the most reliable indicator of citizens' political involvement. I suggest that there have been effects on the general public, the traditional news organizations, and democratic institutions.

First, non-traditional news viewers have had greater exposure in the '92 Campaign to the candidates via the talk shows. Referring to Figure 1, talk shows fulfill the third democratic expectation of the media, providing platforms available for political candidates. The talk show circuit provides numerous platforms for the candidates to be seen by different audiences. Although there has been some criticism of the candidates reliance on talk shows and avoidance of hard-news formats (as discussed above), the more the general public can see and hear the candidates, the better it is for democracy. Stephen Hess of the Brookings Institute has said

> Any time you expose more people to the men and women who run our government, or aspire to run it, it's a good thing. This doesn't mean I want the Washington Post or the networks to close up shop. But these new formats are complementary. MTV and Donahue reach people who don't read newspapers or watch the network news (Taylor, 1992).

It would seem to be an achievement that viewers of talk shows, many of whom may be disenfranchised voters, would be able to see the candidates and, potentially, learn about the issues. If people are unhappy with traditional politics and traditional media, as Kalb (1992) has suggested, then these sources of information may be just perfect for these disenfranchised voters. If, however, the talk show format offers mostly "softball" questions, how much can these voters actually learn? Or does it even matter? Research needs to examine how talk show politics make people feel about the electoral process, rather than simply examining what they have learned. If people think that candidate appearances on talk shows is something good, it may increase their trust and efficacy in government. It may not matter if "softball" questions are asked by talk show interviewers if the public feels that it is involved in a dialogue with the candidates. The public's agenda can be very different from journalist's, as exemplified when Phil Donahue was berated by his audience for harping on Bill Clinton's alleged infidelities; the public wanted the issues.

Second, one of the primary appeals of talk shows is the direct questioning of the candidate by a viewer calling-in or by a member of the studio audience. There are rare opportunities -- even during personal appearances -- in which the public has the opportunity to directly address a candidate and receive an answer. This dialogue between candidate and voter can be politically empowering for both the person asking the question and the viewer at home. For the person asking the question, this is an opportunity to address an issue of national, local, or personal significance. The questioner suddenly becomes an active participant in the political debate and this may lead to greater internal efficacy. If people watching at home identify with the question being asked ("The question Joe from Des Moines asked is the same question I would have asked"), this may also lead to greater feelings of internal efficacy for the viewers. One problem is that the number of callers who actually do get through to speak with the candidates is few and far between. The vicarious power of having the possibility to speak with the candidates may have important effects on the public's feelings of inclusion in the political process. Larry King (1992) has said, "Just knowing you can call and yell at an elected official makes the whole world seem somewhat closer." Talk shows create dialogues between candidates and the public in a way that makes the candidate's televised appearances almost more "personal" than actual personal appearances.

As talk shows have changed politics-as-usual in the '92 Campaign, traditional news has appeared to lose its credibility with the public. Judging by their high ratings, the public wants more talk show appearances, not more traditional news coverage. One effect of talk shows is that the public has shown that it likes politics without traditional hard news journalists. Who needs Ted Koppel when a call-in question is equally as good? Rosen (1992), among others, see this as potentially harmful to journalists:

> If journalists cannot convince the rest of us that they belong on-screen, that they are worth listening to, that they add something to public discourse that would be

> missing if they were not there, then the press will lose an asset of inestimable value: not only the attention of television viewers, but the public support in need to remain free and independent (20).

This scenario does not, however, have to be as gloomy as Rosen suggests. Although in the model presented here (Figure 1) there is a dichotomy between the expectations of traditional news and talk shows, there is no reason why these expectations must continue to be divided in the future. Taylor (1992) suggests that traditional news can raise the level of public discourse by adopting some of the innovations of the talk shows: longer interviews, easier access, and greater unmediated communication between voters and candidates. The potential is there for a transformation in political communication that can be led by traditional news.

Talk shows may ultimately have their greatest impact on the erosion of democratic institutions including the political parties and the presidency itself. First, candidates no longer have to use the strengths of the political parties to gain support when it is easier to gain support directly from the people. This development creates a division where a president could be elected without party support, but a political system in which governing is dependent on party support. Second, while the success of talk show politics places great faith in the public to operate in an unmediated political dialogue, there is still a great fear in such heightened populism. This argument is based on the strengths of a representative democracy and the weaknesses of a direct democracy. Mansfield (1992) has said that talk show proponents fail

> to understand the need for space between government and people in a democracy. Constitutional space allows the government to do its job without having to fear unpopularity, and it enables the people to stand back from the government and judge what it has done without too much prejudicial involvement (13).

Third, the role of the president is seen to be greatly diminished by talk shows. No longer is the president a leader of the nation, but "a folk hero . . . Clinton and Gore look like co-captains of the local high school team" (Graff, 1992:45). This could be a positive development if the public feels closer to the president, which could lead to greater public support. However, this could be a negative development if the public views the president as another of a long line of current celebrities (albeit a four year celebrity). If we see the president one night and Madonna the next night, the talk shows may help create a greater cynicism in the office of the president and in politics.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper has presented a new set of democratic expectations of media performance during an election campaign based on a dichotomy between traditional news media and talk shows. This dichotomy is partially the result of a continuing decline in viewers of traditional media, an attempt by candidates to present un-mediated messages to the public, and a growing public dissatisfaction with traditional news media. Thus functions previously performed by traditional media in past elections have been fulfilled by talk shows in the '92 Campaign.

Where does political communication go from here? The capabilities of talk shows to create a direct, unmediated dialogue between candidates and the public seem limited only by the willingness of the candidates to appear on the programs and the networks to continue broadcasting them. The high ratings that the talk shows received suggest that candidates might easily turn to formats that could bring even higher ratings and greater political exposure to the disenfranchised. Will candidates of the future appear at the Super Bowl, often the highest rated program each year, taking questions from football fans during the half-time show? Candidates may also want to appeal to different segments of disenfranchised voters. Moving beyond "Donahue," "Arsenio," and the morning news programs, candidates could reach segments of the public who may not watch those "traditional" talk shows by taking call-in questions between purchases on "The Home Shopping Network."

Politicians have historically used non-traditional media to bypass journalist mediation and communicate directly with the mass public. As communication technology advanced, politicians abandoned print for radio, and radio for television. In this historical context the talk show politics of the '92 Campaign can be seen as the next logical progression of this political communication evolution. Candidates may soon be able to use computer networks to communicate to the public on their most up-to-the-minute issue stands -- updating and changing them as often as necessary.

One of the greatest concerns with talk shows is that they have "gone too far" and will eventually have harmful effects both on the traditional media and the presidency. No previous candidate has donned sunglasses and played the saxophone on late-night television, but in 1992 that man was elected president. Will talk show appearances help the public to know and understand more about their next president, or will they tire of Clinton as quickly as they do of today's current celebrity-star? What musical instrument will future candidates play?

The future of traditional media is just as problematic. If the public no longer values the role of the media in covering elections, then talk shows, or its future manifestation, will usurp even more of the democratic expectations of media performance. The traditional media will need to take the lessons of talk shows and apply them to their future election coverage for this not to occur. Only then will there be a real possibility to move political communication to a higher level of public discourse.

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FIGURE 1

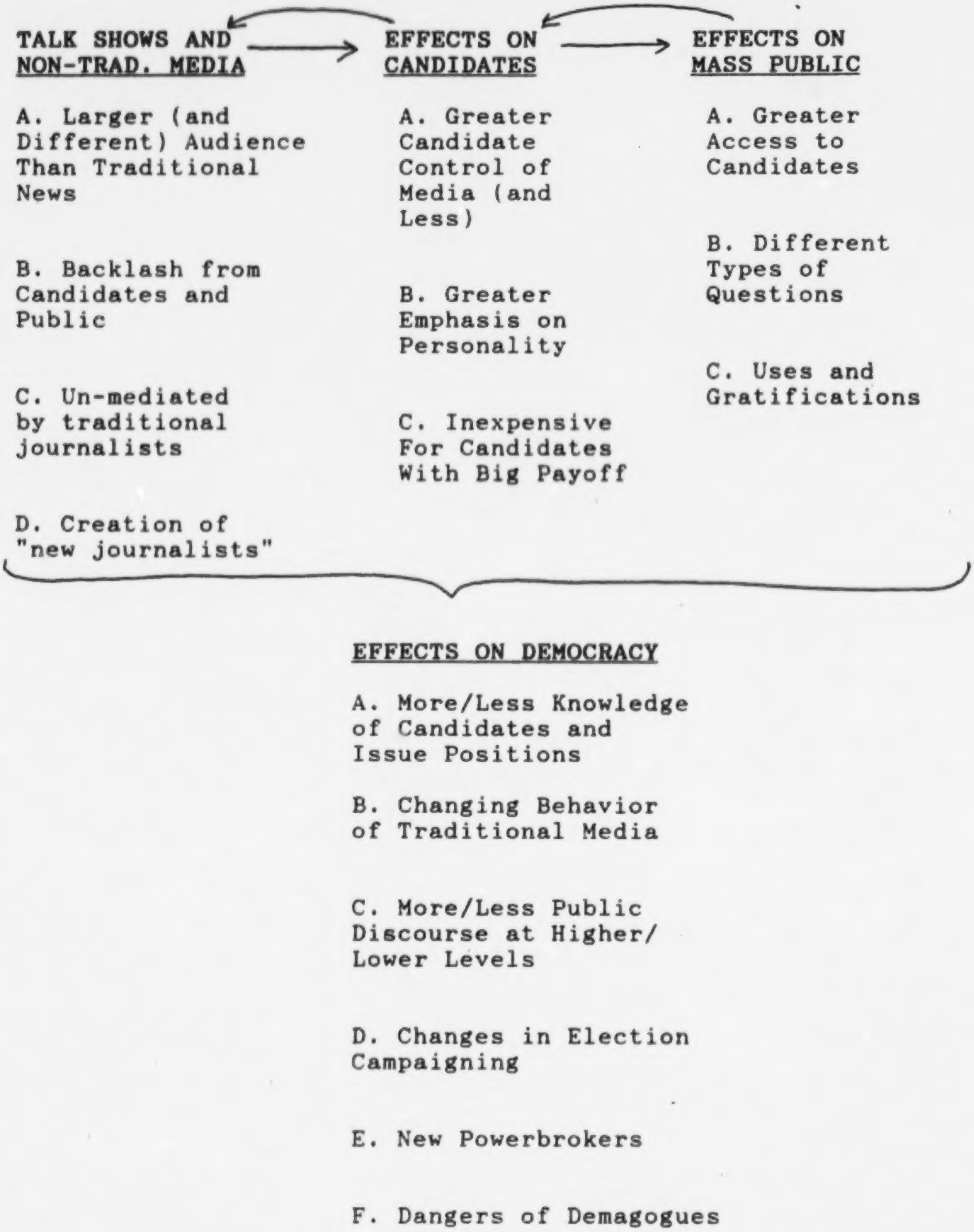
Democratic Expectations of Media Performance During an Election Campaign

adapted from Gurevitch and Blumler (1990); and McLeod, Kosicki, and McLeod (1991)

TALK SHOW MEDIA	TRADITIONAL MEDIA
	1) Daily coverage of the election campaign and candidates
	2) Identification and explanation of key campaign issues
3) Availability of platforms for political candidates	
4) Dialogues between candidates and mass public	
	5) Scrutiny of candidate positions and platforms
6) Incentives for public involvement through open forums and call-in questions	
	7) Maintaining election coverage with traditional venues and journalists
8) Respect for public's political sophistication	

FIGURE 2

A New Communications Model of Talk Show Democracy



TALK SHOWS AND NON-TRAD. MEDIA

A. Larger (and Different) Audience Than Traditional News

B. Backlash from Candidates and Public

C. Un-mediated by traditional journalists

D. Creation of "new journalists"

EFFECTS ON CANDIDATES

A. Greater Candidate Control of Media (and Less)

B. Greater Emphasis on Personality

C. Inexpensive For Candidates With Big Payoff

EFFECTS ON MASS PUBLIC

A. Greater Access to Candidates

B. Different Types of Questions

C. Uses and Gratifications

EFFECTS ON DEMOCRACY

A. More/Less Knowledge of Candidates and Issue Positions

B. Changing Behavior of Traditional Media

C. More/Less Public Discourse at Higher/ Lower Levels

D. Changes in Election Campaigning

E. New Powerbrokers

F. Dangers of Demagogues

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The Effect of "Horse Race" Reporting in Increasing Voters' Issue Knowledge

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Top Faculty Paper

**Paper to be presented at the annual meeting of the
Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication,
Communication Theory and Method Division,
August 1993, Kansas City**

Abstract

The Effect of "Horse Race" Reporting in Increasing Voters' Issue Knowledge

Numerous studies have been conducted on "horse-race reporting," of pre-election polls but most assume an adverse impact. This study focuses on one aspect of poll reporting -- its impact on voters' knowledge of candidates' issue positions. We hypothesize that poll reporting may actually help issue coverage by increasing voters' knowledge, despite the widely spread belief that the two compete with each other. We report results from three data sources from the 1992 presidential election -- a statewide one-time survey, a three-county panel survey, and a classroom experiment using student subjects. The surveys show a significant relationship between attention to polls and knowledge and between exposure to polls and knowledge. The experiment indicates that poll information influences memory for issue knowledge in a news story.

The Effect of "Horse Race" Reporting in Increasing Voters' Issue Knowledge

One of the greatest ironies in U.S. political communication comes from the pre-election coverage of public opinion polls. The media report polls, the audience watches polls, and politicians use polls, while the same people condemn the polls for doing great harm to the democracy (Traugott, 1988, 1991; Crespi, 1989; Graber, 1989; Lavrakas et al, 1991; and see Shales, 1992; NBC, 1992, for comments from President Bush).

During the 1992 election, President Bush attacked the "endless," "nutty" polls so vigorously that the attack itself became an "image of the year" in annual post-election reviews (NBC, 1992; Shales, 1992). Further, based on a survey of the 1988 election, a larger percentage (44% vs. 36%) of U.S. residents said polls[1] were harmful as opposed to being useful (Lavrakas et al, 1991). Such attacks on poll reporting have led newspaper editors to feel guilty about their poll reporting, causing editors to sometimes delete the most important predictions from their poll stories (Meyer, 1991). And, during the 1992 election, major U.S. media questioned the value of polls, while segments of the newspaper industry launched experimental reforms in two large cities to shift the focus of poll coverage away from predicting winners and losers (Miller, 1991; Meyer, 1993).

Poll coverage has such an ill reputation among researchers that it is labeled "horse-race reporting," with a distinctively negative tone. Numerous studies have been conducted on "horse-race reporting," based on the explicit or implicit assumption that it has an adverse impact (see, for example, Patterson and McClure, 1976; Patterson, 1980; Kern, 1990; Swanson and Nimmo, 1990).

We, joining the few lonely voices in defense of poll coverage (Gallup & Rae, 1940; Meyer, 1989, 1991), will question some of the assumptions behind such criticism and self-criticism. In this paper we will focus on one aspect of poll reporting -- its impact on voters' knowledge of candidates' issue positions. We will hypothesize that poll reporting may actually help issue coverage by increasing voters' knowledge, despite the widely spread belief that the two compete with each other.

Because the hypothesis may have important implications, we want to be extra cautious with the methodology of our tests. Of three commonly used methods -- one-time survey, panel survey, and controlled experiment -- each has its own strengths and weaknesses. So that the methods can compensate each other's weaknesses and confirm each other's findings, we did all three in the 1992 election -- a statewide one-time survey, a three-county panel survey, and a classroom experiment using student subjects. This paper will report the major findings from the three studies.

General Theories on Polls, Their Effects, and Democracy

The criticism against poll coverage is based on the fear that 1) polls have an effect, and 2) the effect is bad for democracy because polls shape rather than reflect public opinion (Traugott, 1988, 1991; Lavrakas et al, 1991). Although five decades of survey and experiment have failed to show convincing evidence that polls either unfairly help underdogs or give momentum to front runners, the prevalent belief--even among those who would defend polls--is that the media's reporting of poll results has a direct effect on public attitudes and voting behavior (Merkle, 1991).

Specifically, most of the complaints about pre-election polls may fall into the following categories:

* Pre-election polls allow the media to emphasize in its reports who is ahead and who is behind, influencing voters' choices by affecting their assessments of candidates' electability and image (see Patterson, 1980; Meyer, 1989; Lavrakas et al, 1991).
* Polls themselves affect public opinion through the process of measuring that opinion, thus enhancing the chance that the polls will change opinion (Lavrakas et al 1991).
* Polls do not contain useful information for the public, and in fact are too accurate, containing information that discourages people from voting when they believe the polls indicate that the election outcome is a foregone conclusion (Lavrakas et al, 1991)
* Polls, by emphasizing winning and losing, slight more important issues that need coverage (Graber, 1989).
* Polls are poorly reported, leading to confusion about how

they should be interpreted (Lavrakas et al, 1991). They lack context, they do not explain how the polls might be in error, and they are oversimplified (see Meyer, 1989, Hickman, 1991; Holley, 1991).

- There are too many polls, stating the obvious (see Meyer, 1989), while confusing and antagonizing the public (Lavrakas et al, 1991).
- Polls make too many mistakes (see Meyer, 1989).

The Case For Polls. One of the few positive voices for polls, Phil Meyer (1989), argues that even if polls do shape opinion, the polls have multiple benefits to voters and the democratic process. As Meyer (1989, p. 200) suggested, "Is it not reasonable to suppose that giving voters accurate information about each other, about the relative voting strength and the preferences of different groups in the electorate might help, not hurt?" George Gallup (Gallup & Rae, 1940) argued that public opinion polls represented the views of common people who should be active participants in a direct democracy. Polls represented a way for government to know the public will and to respond to that will (Gallup & Rae, 1940). Such theorizing in defense of polls, however, has rarely been tested empirically.

Poll Coverage, Issue Coverage, and Issue Knowledge

Although many of poll criticisms are debatable, this paper will focus on only one particular aspect -- the effect of poll coverage on voters' knowledge of candidates' issue positions.

Among the criticisms of polls, five points are directly related to the topic (see Crespi, 1989, Holley, 1991; Lavrakas, Holley & Miller, 1991; Wheeler, 1980):

1) If the electorate is to make an informed decision, it is necessary for the voters to know such things as the issues facing the nation and the candidates' positions on the issues.
2) Other information, such as who is winning and who is losing, is not needed.
3) Voters are not capable of handling the un-needed extra information rationally. They would be confused by "horse-race" information and would treat the election as a real horse race, causing voters to lose interest in learning useful issue information.
4) Therefore, the "horse-race" reporting competes with issue reporting for voters' attention and cognitive energy. Hence "horse-race" has a negative impact on voters' issue knowledge.
5) "Horse-race" reporting also competes with issue reporting for print space and air time.

We have no quarrel with the first point. Although the second one is debatable (see Meyer 1989, p. 200), due to space limitations, we can assume it is true for the purpose of this paper.

The third point assumes that voters are irrational, a view that was popular 30 years ago among political scientists (e.g., Lazarsfeld, Berelson & Gaudet, 1944; Campbell, Converse, Miller & Stokes, 1960). Key (1966) was among the first to criticize this view. Based on analysis of years of survey data, he argued that "voters are not fools." After three decades of continued debate and study on increasingly abundant data, the dominant view among political scientists is now represented by book titles such as The Rational Public (Page and Shapiro, 1992), or by the following summary from the book:

> [The public] is able to make distinctions; it is organized in coherent patterns; it is reasonable, based on the best available information; and it is adaptive to new information or changed circumstances, responding in similar ways to similar stimuli (1992, p. 14).

It may be, therefore, useful to re-theorize the relationship between polls and issue knowledge based on the alternative assumption that voters are rational.

In this view, there are good reasons behind voters' attention or lack of it to media coverage. First, voters pay attention to the issues that are seen as important to their personal life, such as job security during a recession or national security during a war. Second, voters pay attention to the events that are entertaining, such as sports. If an event is seen as important and entertaining, it would attract even more attention.

Attention, of course, is not the only variable that is required for learning. Cognitive processing and retention is as important. Here, again, "horse-race" reporting may help rather than hurt. Under the rational assumption, voters can best process and retain information when they find it relevant and when they have a context or frame to process the information (Neuman et al, 1992). Election issues, while maybe important to the nation as whole, are often seen by some individual voters as irrelevant to their personal life. To this group of voters, a "horse-race" portrayal of the election may provide the context and mental framework needed for cognitive processing and retention.

The critics say poll coverage makes an election look like a horse race. If true, elections would be made entertaining, and therefore attract more attention from many voters. The election would also be made meaningful to those who would otherwise see it as irrelevant, and therefore help them process and remember the issue information. The critics also charge that "horse race" reporting makes elections trivial, and therefore discourages voters' attention. Not so, according to rationality assumptions. Voters, while entertained by the horse-race aspect of the election, are smart enough to know that it is not merely a horse race. They are clever enough to understand that an election is no less important just because it is also interesting, exciting or meaningful.

So, contrary to the criticism that poll reporting competes with issue coverage, we speculate that poll reporting helps increase voters' attention to issue coverage, and further, helps some voters process and retain the information, increasing voters' knowledge of important issues.

Along this line of reasoning, the fifth point, about competition for space and time, should not have been a real concern. The media cover many other events during an election year, including real horse races (sports), other entertainment, weather, and natural disasters. Why aren't they considered to be competing with election issues? While there is a competition in the sense that each media outlet has a limited news hole for election news, there is an opportunity for increased issue coverage elsewhere in the media -- another column, another time, or another medium. The total amount of issue information available is more than any single individual can possibly process. The real question is whether many voters are interested enough to attend to, process, and retain such information. Because so called "horse-race" reporting is about elections, we speculate that it can engage voters in election issues. It is probably more capable of doing so than many other media content, such as sports and weather. Hence our hypothesis:

> H: Exposure to poll coverage has a positive effect on voters' knowledge of candidates' issue positions.

Methodological Issues

Three research methods are commonly used to test the kind of media impact we hypothesized -- cross-sectional survey, panel survey, and controlled lab experiment. Each has its own strengths and weaknesses.

One-time surveys are considered strong in their external validity, thanks to probability sampling. But they are weak in internal validity when causal inference is required. An observed correlation between A and B does not necessarily indicate an effect of A on B because the correlation may be the result of 1) reverse causality -- effect of B on A; or 2) third variable effect-- the effect of other variables on both A and B. The third-variable problem is often partially addressed by controlling for those "other variables." It cannot be totally solved within survey research because it is impossible to control for all the variables that might have an effect.

Panel surveys can effectively address the reverse causality problem by measuring the same variable twice or more over time, and therefore their internal validity may be a little higher. But by doing so we also introduce testing effect -- later measures may change just because the respondents have been asked the same questions before. Panel surveys also share the third-variable problem. Further, the relatively high cost associated with panel surveys often force researchers to restrict the geographic span of their samples or to use a smaller sample size or both. So the external validity tends to be lower for panel surveys than for the one-time surveys.

Controlled experiments can effectively address both reverse causality problems and third-variable problems. The measurement effect would not exist if an after-only design is used. So experiments are often considered to have the highest internal validity. Nevertheless, the requirement of experimental control makes probability sampling difficult. In fact experimenters typically use undergraduate students as subjects, who tend to be different from the general population in many aspects. Further, the unnatural setting in a classroom makes it difficult to generalize findings to everyday life. So experiments are often considered to have the lowest external validity.

All three methods, however, do not share the same problems. Panel surveys and experiments do not have the problem of reverse causality. One-time surveys and after-only experiments do not have the problem of measurement effect. One-time surveys and panel surveys don't have the problem of poor generalizability. Experiments don't have the problem of third-variable effect, and the problem can be partially addressed within one-time surveys and panel surveys.

Therefore, if similar results are found using all three methods, the findings are strong in both internal and external validity. This is what we hope to achieve in this study. We will report results of three studies conducted during the 1992 presidential election -- a statewide one-time survey, a three-county panel survey, and a controlled experiment.

A Statewide One-Time Survey

The data for this part of the study are from a statewide poll, the Carolina Poll, a semi-annual event conducted at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. It is jointly sponsored by the School of Journalism and Mass Communication and the Institute for Research in Social Science. Respondents for the October 1992 survey were 841 adult residents of the state, who were selected using random digit dialing. The interviews were conducted during a six-day period just before the November election by journalism students enrolled in news writing and research classes.

Measurements. A total of seventeen variables from the survey will be included in the analysis. Their wordings and univariate statistics appear in Appendix 1. The major dependent variable, knowledge of issue positions, was the number of correct answers in identifying which candidate (Bush, Clinton or Perot) was more likely to support each of seven different issue positions.

The major independent variable was the attention each respondent paid to media's poll coverage. (Each respondent was asked: How much attention have paid to poll stories that describe which presidential candidate is winning or losing? A lot, some, a little, not at all). Media attention is often used as an alternative exposure measure (see Chaffee and Schleuder, 1986; McLeod and McDonald, 1986; Drew and Weaver, 1990). While Chaffee and Schleuder (1986) argued that attention to television is a better measure than exposure to television, exposure continues to be used, particularly for print media. Since our interest is on poll coverage in all media, we will use attention measure in this one-time survey and the exposure measure in the panel survey[2].

To partially address the problem of third-variable effect, eight control variables -- age, gender, race, education, income, residence (urban or rural), voting intention, which candidate to vote for, political party identification, -- were also measured. Because of dummy codings for categorical variables and missing cases (see Cohen and Cohen, 1983, pp. 284-9), the total number of control variables in the regression analysis is 16.

Data Analysis. Table 1 is the correlation matrix for all major variables. The results of hierarchal regression analysis are summarized in Table 2. The sixteen control variables were entered first. They accounted for 27% of the variance in the dependent variable (Eq. 1-1), constituting a quite stringent base for testing the effect of any independent variable.

Equation 1-2 indicates that Attention Polls makes a significant contribution, adding 1.1% to the R-squared ($t=3.54$, $p<.001$). The Beta coefficient has a positive sign. Apparently, in this state, those voters who pay more attention to poll coverage also tend to have more knowledge about candidates' issue positions. Our hypothesis is therefore supported by this statewide one-time survey.

Although not a central concern for this paper, we also compared the predictive power of attention to polls with three other often studied media exposure variables. We first replaced Poll Attention in Eg. 1-2 (Table 2) with a newspaper reading variable. It produced a positive Beta coefficient and a stronger predictive power than Attention to Polls ($\Delta R^2=1.37\%$, $p<.001$). This finding gives us confidence in the procedure we are following. Newspaper reading has proven, across many studies with a variety of controls, to be a reliable predictor of public affairs knowledge (McLeod and McDonald, 1986; Drew and Weaver, 1990).

We then replaced newspaper reading with, alternately, attention to issue coverage in TV news and attention to candidates' TV ads. Both produced positive Beta coefficients. But attention to television ads has a smaller ΔR^2 (0.4%, $p<.05$) than attention to polls ($\Delta R^2=1.1\%$, $p<.001$), while attention to TV news ($\Delta R^2=2.3\%$, $p<.001$) has the strongest predictive power. While voters report that they rely more heavily on television news than any other sources of information, synthesizing literature often cites Patterson and McClure's study (1976) showing that voters in fact learn more from candidates' television advertising. Our findings suggest that the effectiveness of poll coverage on knowledge are comparable to both.

A Three-County Panel Survey

To verify the results from the statewide survey, particularly to test the possibility of reverse causal relation, a two-wave panel survey was conducted. Three hundred and sixty adult residents of a three-county metropolitan area (Wake, Durham and Orange counties in North Carolina) were interviewed during a three-day period in the first week of October, 1992. The same respondents were called again during the last weekend before election day, 235 of whom were reached and interviewed. Interviewers were students from an undergraduate research class at the School of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. They used random-digit dialing method to compile the sample.

The interviewers asked to speak to the adult of a household who would have the next birthday. Each number was called at least three times. During the first wave, respondents were NOT told that they would be called back at a later date. During the second wave, the respondents were told that the survey was a class project and the professor wanted more information. Part of the survey asked respondents which presidential candidate they were going to vote for on election day. The election prediction from the second wave matched the final election results for the three-county area, suggesting that the sample was representative of the area. We would note that in providing strong support for Clinton, that this three-county area, which is urban with pockets of high income and high education, is not representative of the nation or the state.

Measurements. A total of seven variables from the survey will be included in the analysis. Their wordings and univariate statistics appear in Appendix 2. The major dependent variable, knowledge of issue positions from the second wave, was the number of correct answers in identifying which candidate (Bush, Clinton or Perot) was more likely to support each of eight different issue positions. Since we used attention to polls in the one-time survey reported above, the major independent variable in the panel analysis will be Exposure to Polls measured in the first wave. It was measured by asking respondents, "In an election, some polls are conducted to determine which candidate is winning or losing. In the past month, how many news stories have you seen in newspapers, television, magazines or radio that report the results of such polls? Many, Some, A Few or None?"

Following the common practice in analyzing panel data, we will use the same issue knowledge measured at the first wave as a control variable in regression analysis (e.g., Hsiao, 1986). When knowledge is the dependent variable, it has been suggested that different measures be used at different waves to reduce the testing effect (Chaffee, Roser, & Flora, 1989). We chose to use identical knowledge measures because it gives the most stringent test against reverse causal relation, our main concern here. The threat from testing effect is double-checked in the one-time survey and the experiment with after-only design. Further, since the testing effect typically increases the ceiling effect, which reduces the observed media effect[3], it would provide an extra high barrier that only strong media effects can overcome.

Five additional control variables, age, gender, income, education and a dummy variable that handles missing income scores, were also collected.

Data Analysis. The average correct number of answers for the knowledge tests increased from 63.08% (sd=22.65) at Wave 1 to 72.13% (sd=23.76) at Wave 2, which makes subsequent analysis meaningful. As expected, there is a strong correlation between Time 1 Knowledge and Time 2 Knowledge (r = .73) (see Table 3).

Insert Tables 3, 4 about here

Time 1 Issue Knowledge and the other five control variables were first entered into the regression, with Time 2 Issue Knowledge as the dependent variable (Table 4, Eq. 2-1). They accounted for 55.53% ($p<.001$) of the total variance. Eq. 2-2 indicates that Exposure to Polls increases the R^2 significantly by 1.25% ($t=2.56$, $p<.05$), and the Beta coefficient has a positive sign. Apparently, in this three-county metropolitan area, heavier poll exposure at time 1 is positively associated with larger increase in issue knowledge during the last month of election. Our hypothesis is again supported by this three-county panel survey.

We once again compared predictive power of Exposure to Polls with three other media variables. When Poll Exposure in Eg. 2-2 (Table 4) was replaced alternately by each of the three following variables, newspaper reading again shows a positive effect ($\Delta R^2=1.89\%$, $p<.01$) that is stronger than Poll Exposure ($\Delta R^2=1.25\%$), while attention to TV news can contribute almost nothing ($\Delta R^2 = 0.02\%$, $p=0.77$), and attention to TV ads has a significant and negative effect ($\Delta R^2=1.15\%$, $p<.05$). The positive effect of newspaper reading again verifies our procedure despite our original concern over testing effect. The zero or even negative effects of television news or ads suggest that effect of polls in increasing voters' issue knowledge is strong indeed.

An After-Only, Repeated Measure Experiment

Most experiments involving news stories with poll content have been used to explore the influence of polls in shaping support for candidates who are ahead or losing the race. Typically, such experiments have used voting preferences as a dependent variable (Cook & Welch, 1940) or intention to vote as the dependent variable (Ceci & Kain, 1982; Lavrakas et al, 1991) when trying to predict opinion shifts according to reports on which presidential candidate is winning or losing. Other researchers have used fictitious elections (Laponce, 1966; Fleitas, 1971) to study voter preferences. In general, the results of the studies have supported the idea that polls do affect voter preference, either in favor of the underdog or the front-runner, depending on different factors. Other dependent variables in experiments have included the influence of polls on individual attitudes toward a president's performance (Nazzio, 1977), or change of opinion on important issues (Kaplowitz et al, 1983).

Instead of looking at how polls affect opinion change or voter preference, our experiment considers the influence of polls on voter knowledge. According to the hypothesis stated above, we expected that news stories that included poll information about who was winning or losing the race would increase reader knowledge when compared with similar stories that did not include poll information.

Method. The design of this experiment called for creation of a pair of news stories dealing with issue information and a pair without issue information. In each pair, one story had poll information added to create a total of four treatments. We also wanted stories to be at three levels, for a total of 12 news stories. One level of stories was based on the actual national presidential election of 1992, and the other two levels involved fictitious elections: a mayoral race and a race for student body president at an unnamed university.

Multiple stories and levels were used to minimize the possibility that some element of the stories other than poll effects caused the effects to be measured (Jackson, 1992). The stories were written by a former professional journalist with 10 years of newspaper experience. The issues in the stories were adapted from real news stories.

Treatments. One pair of news stories at each level included issue information, with the pair of stories nearly identical except for the manipulation, which included a paragraph that told readers who was winning the race and that the loser was closing the gap between the two. The other pair of stories included no issue information, focusing on trivial campaign news, while including poll information in one story for each of the pairs (see Table 5 for a chart showing each of the 12 cells). All the stories were about the same length, with minor information being deleted from stories that had poll information added.

The analysis of the data was planned to be a one-way analysis of variance in knowledge scores for issues stories, and a one-way analysis of variance for the effects of polls on non-issue stories. The interactions between levels and treatments are not of interest to this study. It may be useful, however, to visualize the design as a 2 X 2 X 3 (see Table 5): with the treatments being Issue story or Non-Issue story BY Poll story or Non-poll story BY the three levels of Presidential Race, Mayoral Race and University Student President Race.

Subjects. Seventy-two students, mostly undergraduates at the School of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, each read three of the 12 news stories in an repeated measures, incomplete, randomized design (See Table 5 for a chart of the design, including a listing of subjects' cell assignments). The order of story presentation was counter-balanced so each story was read first, second or third an equal number of times (six). The goal of the design was to ensure that 1) each subject read only one story at each level; that 2) no subject read only issue stories; and that 3) each subject read at least one story that involved issue knowledge.

Procedures. The subjects read one story and then answered questions relating to the story, and then read another story etc. Written instructions emphasized that they should not look back at the story when answering the questionnaires. Monitors reported 100% compliance with the instructions.

Students volunteered to participate in the experiments and received credit in one of their journalism school classes for participating. All the experiments were conducted between 5 and 7 p.m. on a weekday in the middle of the fall semester, about two weeks before the national elections of 1992. Subjects took from 20 to 30 minutes to complete the experiments.

Dependent Variable. This study includes one dependent variable: Knowledge, based on answers to aided recall tests that varied according to which story a subject read. It was measured by asking subjects to correctly identify in a multiple choice test which candidates supported each of a series of four issue stands, while a fifth multiple choice question was based on specific information related to the issue stands of the candidates. Included in the Knowledge score was an open-ended, aided recall test on five items. For treatments that did not involve issues, the questions asked for general knowledge from the story.

Planned Analyses. Because of the repeated measures, incomplete design, the SAS General Linear Model (PC-version 6.4) was used, controlling for subject effect. For analysis of the effect of polls on Knowledge, we analyzed the news stories that contained issues--looking at the effect of Poll Information and the effect of No Poll Information on the dependent variable across all three levels. The non-issue stories were intended as a comparison group and were analyzed separately, but similarly.

Results. The mean score of the dependent variable Knowledge for issue stories with poll information (n=54, mean=6.72, sd=2.48) is significantly greater (df=1, 35; F=4.80; p<.05) than issue stories without poll information (n=54, mean=6.39, sd=2.37). Table 6 includes the analysis of variance statistics.

For the three pairs of non-issue stories, the direction of the effect was similar: stories with poll information had higher mean recall scores (total mean for each treatment: 7.88 vs. 7.37), but the effect was not significant at the .05 level. Once again, our hypothesis is supported by this controlled experiment.

Insert Table 6 and 7 about here

The positive results suggest that readers given poll information use that information in structuring their understanding of the election. This is especially apparent in looking at the results of the two fictitious elections--the one for student president of the university and the city mayoral race. In the mayoral race, the subjects--all college students whom we expected would have little interest in municipal politics--found issue knowledge easier to remember when they also read poll results, and as Table 7 indicates, the difference in means is higher than in the presidential race or the university race. Simply put, it appears that by knowing who was winning and losing, students had more context for understanding the election, and they needed the context because the fictitious municipal race was the most difficult to process (it had the lowest recall scores).

This argument is supported by further analysis of Table 7. In the University race and the Presidential race with issue content, poll information has lower effect on the mean score for Knowledge, but when these two sets of stories lack issue content, poll information has a stronger effect. The results suggest that poll information may aid learning in those situations where voters have a need for context, where they lack background or knowledge about a political race (the local race) or when a news story lacks information about the issues (presidential race and university race).

Typically, people who need context should be a type of audience the media want to reach and inform: those readers who are seeking information with urgency or a need for orientation (see Hickman, 1991). Such readers might be irregular users of the media or people who seldom attend to political information. Information about which candidate is ahead or behind may help those readers understand the election in a way that is easy and convenient. Likewise, when campaign news stories may be important but lack policy issue content, poll information might increase salience of other information in the story by increasing attention to the campaign. Obviously, the results of this experiment apply to print media and may not hold for radio or television news stories with poll content.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on our analysis of three different data sets, we have found:

- In a statewide survey, attention to polls is positively correlated with issue knowledge after controlling for 16 variables associated with demographics and voter characteristics.

- In a three-county area, exposure to polls one month before the election is positively correlated with an increase in issue knowledge detected immediately before the election, after controlling for five demographic variables.
- In a controlled experiment, student subjects who were given both issue and poll information remember more issue information than those students who were given issue information without poll information.

While each of the three methods has its usual limitations, the three combined make a much stronger case. Since the three findings are consistent with each other, we feel more confident to infer that poll coverage does increase voters' knowledge of candidates' issue stands.

This finding should not be surprising. It makes sense that poll information is valuable information for a busy electorate in a confusing world of multiple message sources. Complaints about polls generally assume that the valuable information is being misused in some way, either by a media obsessed with insider politics (see Meyer, 1993) or by an electorate too ignorant or too smart to use the information correctly (Lavrakas et al, 1991). This study does NOT address the misuse of polls, but it does look at how polls help voters.

Criticism of polls is well-intended: to help improve election coverage so it provides more information to voters. The findings from this research, however, seem to suggest that polls and issues do not always compete for attention. Poll reporting may actually help issue reporting. So media focus should be on how to make issue coverage more effective, not on how to make poll coverage less effective.

Instead of trying to understand how polls help voters, researchers have spent most of their time trying to compile evidence that shows how polls undermine democracy. This too makes sense: A valuable tool can be misused. But critics of polls also should take into account the popularity of polls and their positive aspects in the electoral process. This study provides evidence that pre-election polls contribute to the democratic process.

While we have reported some evidences in support of the positive impact of polls on issue knowledge, the cognitive process is not so clear. For example, does poll exposure indeed increase voters' attention, which in turn leads to more knowledge about issues? Also, the general criticism of poll coverage is much broader than what we can deal with in this paper. We did not, for example, look into the possibility that poll coverage discourages voters, or that poll coverage undermines democracy by affecting the election results. While we have gathered data to address some of those broader questions, we will have to report the results in other papers.

A better understanding of how voters process poll information might provide insight into how to combat misuse. Currently, ideas about how to report polls (see Meyer & Jurgensen, 1991; Hickman, 1991; Holley, 1991; Rollberg, Sanders & Buffalo, 1990; Crespi, 1989) rests on intuitive assumptions about what the public needs to know if it is to use poll information correctly. Yet, the research record is not clear on how or why the public uses poll information, and what the public actually does need to know.

Cases of misuse, alone, do not mean polls are bad. Certainly, polls should be a part of media content even as media reform election coverage and attempt to connect election coverage to voter-driven agendas. Reform should accommodate voter curiosity about whom their neighbors support for public office, about who is winning or losing the horse race, and about a particular candidate's chances for victory. To deny this news to voters is to make poll information an expensive commodity, only available to an elite who would use private polls for the private gain of a candidate.

Polls do have effects, they do influence voters, but they may also help people understand the important issues of the campaign. People use polls--and the media report polls--and they appear to do so for very good reasons.

Notes

1. This is a real possibility, given that polls were banned or seriously restricted in many of the Western European countries (Meyer, 1993).

2. We were unable to put both measures in both surveys because of space constraints on the questionnaires.

3. Our hypothesis implies that at Time 1 heavy media users tend to also have more knowledge. When other people gain extra knowledge after Time 1 because of testing effect, those people who already know everything or almost everything can gain no more in knowledge change score.

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TABLE 1 Pearson's Correlations for All Variables in Statewide Survey

(in 1/100)

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.	13.	1
1. KNOW														
2. AGE	-05													
3. FEMALE	-23	08												
4. REPUB.	09	-11	-03											
5. DEMOC.	-08	11	13	-54										
6. URBAN	10	-06	-04	07	-03									
7. EDUC.	39	-16	-06	03	-05	13								
8. INCOME	28	-05	-18	08	-12	13	38							
9. BLACK	-12	-11	13	-27	30	01	-07	-15						
10. WHITE	13	14	-13	25	-23	01	06	10	-85					
11. VOTER	30	22	-03	06	10	05	29	20	-07	15				
12. BUSH	11	03	-05	44	-36	04	07	14	-28	25	27			
13. CLINT.	10	10	10	-37	47	02	05	01	26	-21	28	-45		
14. PEROT	07	-06	-14	-02	-12	06	09	04	-05	06	11	-24	-23	
15. POLLS	09	-03	12	-09	14	-02	01	-02	13	-16	04	-10	22	-0

TABLE 2

The Influence of Attention to Polls on Issue Knowledge of the 1992 U.S. Presidential Campaign After Controlling for Demographics and Voter Characteristics

Hierarchical regression: Dependent variable, Issue Knowledge

	Eq. 1	Eq. 1-2
Income	.087**	.087**
Inc. dummy	-.074*	-.073*
Age	.020	-.016
Age dummy	.041	.028
Gender(Female)	-.181***	-.190***
Black	.020	.023
White	.077	.090
Urban	.033	.035
Education	.269***	.269***
Educ. dummy	.023	.027
Int. to Vote	.143**	.140**
Republican	.047	.046
Democrat	-.052	-.056
Clinton	.149**	.130**
Bush	.048	.049
Perot	.038	.040
Att. Polls		.109***
R square	.270***	.281***
Change in R square		.011***

n=845

* p<.05 **p <.01 ***p<.001

(Note: The table reports standardized beta weights for the listed variables. T dependent variable, Issue Knowledge, is based on the number of correct answers a 7-item knowledge test.)

TABLE 3

Pearson's Correlations for All Variables of Panel Data

(n=235)

	KN1	KN2	GEN	AGE	EDU	INC	INCD
KNOW2	.73**						
GENDER	-.23**	-.18*					
AGE	-.08	-.10	.14				
EDUCTN	.40**	.41**	-.19*	-.09			
INCOME	.20*	.19*	-.05	.07	.23**		
INC DMMY	-.15	-.05	.07	.23**	-.02	-.01	
POLL EXP	.27**	.30**	-.18*	.07	.11	.14	.05

one-tailed significance * = p<.01 ** = p<.001

TABLE 4

The Influence of Exposure to Polls on Issue Knowledge of the 1992 U.S. Presidential Campaign: Panel Data from a Three-County Area

Hierarchical
  Regression: Dependent variable, Issue Knowledge--Wave 2

Independent variables	Eq 2-1	Eq 2-2
Issue Knowledge Wave 1	.713***	.682***
Gender	.009	.009
Age	-.001	-.001
Education	.018**	.019**
Income	.002	.002
Income Dummy	.060	.051
Exposure Polls		.031*
R-Square	.5553***	.5678***
Change in R-Square		.0125*

n=235

* p<.05   **p <.01   ***p<.001

(Note: The table reports standardized beta weights for the listed variables. The dependent variable, Issue Knowledge, is based on the number of correct answers to an 8-item knowledge test.)

TABLE 5

Cell Design for Poll Experiment

	Issue Information		Non-Issue Information	
	Poll Info	No Poll	Poll	No Poll
NAT	1 to 18*	19-36	37-54	55-72
CITY	55 to 72	1-18	19-36	37-54
UN	37 to 54	55-72	1-18	19-36

* = Numbers in each cell indicate, by subject IDs, who received each treatment

Nat = national presidential election story (real)
City= city mayor's race (not real)
Un = University election for student president (not real)

Note: story presentation order was counterbalanced

TABLE 6

Influence of Poll Information on Issue Knowledge after Manipulating News Stories

Source	DF	SS	Mean Square	F	Pr>F
Subject	71	503.17	7.09	2.25	0.005
Poll Info	1	15.13	15.13	4.80	0.035
Error	35	110.38	3.15		
Total	107	628.67			

R-square=0.82

Issue knowledge mean = 6.56

TABLE 7

Experiment: Mean Differences Due to Poll Effects

Dependent Variable	Issue Knowledge		
	Poll	No Poll	Poll effect
LEVEL			
Presidential election with Issues	6.61	6.39	+0.22
Local election with Issues	6.06	5.33	+0.73
University election with Issues	7.50	7.44	+0.06
Presidential election No Issues	8.61	7.83	+0.78
Local election No Issues	6.39	6.11	+0.28
University election No Issues	8.67	8.17	+0.50
Average for Treatment	7.30	6.88	+0.42

APPENDIX A

STATEWIDE POLL DATA

Subjects for this secondary analysis were 841 adult residents of a state, who were interviewed during a six-day period just before election day. As part of the poll design, the Charlotte area of North Carolina was oversampled. Data were weighted to correct for the oversampling so the results can be generalized to the state.[1]

Dependent Variables. Issue Knowledge is the main dependent variable. It was based on the number of correct answers in identifying which candidate (Bush, Clinton or Perot) was more likely to support each of seven different issue positions, with each correct answer earning 1 point.[2]

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[1] To compensate for the oversampling, the sample was weighted down for the extra cases and then weighted up for the cases outside the oversampling area, resulting in a rounding off error (actual total sample was 841 adults) and a total of 845 cases for analysis.

[2] We proposed the knowledge questions in such a way that there was only one right choice (either Bush, Clinton, or Perot). But those questions had to be modified to meet the needs of other researchers working on unrelated projects. The modification did not affect any item except the one that asked respondents to judge which candidate favors the statement, "Taxes should be increased for those who earn more than $90,000 a year." While "Bush" is clearly a wrong choice and "Perot" is clearly right, it was not immediately clear how should "Clinton" be coded. Clinton explicitly proposed to raise tax for those who make more than $200,000 a year, but he also said he would not rule out the possibility of raising taxes for people with lower incomes ("I will not say, 'Read my lips'"). Since respondents were not asked to recall which candidate said this (which would make Clinton a clearly wrong choice), but instead to judge which candidate is likely to favor the statement, a voter reading between lines of Clinton's statements may reasonably conclude that he is as much in favor of tax increase as Perot is. So we chose to code "Clinton" as a correct answer, a choice supported by statistics obtained later. A clear majority (64.9%) of the respondents chose "Clinton" in answering this item. Among the four options -- delete the item altogether, code as a wrong answer, code as a partially correct

Independent Variables. The main independent variable to be studied is Attention to Polls. Attention to TV Ads and Attention to TV News are used for comparative reasons. Attention to Polls was based on one question asking how much attention respondents paid to polls about who was winning and losing in the presidential campaign (on a 4-point scale, none at all, a little, some, or a lot). Attention to TV Ads and Attention to TV News were each measured by a composite of two questions, asking respondents how much they paid attention to TV ads and TV news about the Clinton campaign and TV ads and TV news about the Bush campaign.

Control variables. We controlled for demographics: age, gender, education, income and whether they lived in an urban or rural area; and for voter characteristics: intention to vote in the election, whom they reported that they would vote for if the election were held today, and political party identification.

Missing values for the control variables were handled by substituting the mean if the case was missing a value for age, income or education and entering a separate dummy variable for each of the three variables into the regression equation.

---

answer, and code as a correct answer -- our choice gave the highest Cronbach's Alpha score (0.60 vs. 0.52 - 0.58 under other codings). Further, we ran regression equations using each of the different dependent codings. Each gave essentially the same estimates regarding the effects of news and ads.

APPENDIX A continued

Frequency Distribution of Issue Awareness Items: Statewide Survey
(n=845)

Which candidate, George Bush, Bill Clinton or Ross Perot is more likely to favor the following statement:

Income Taxes: Taxes should be raised for those households who earn more than $90,000 a year?
Correct (Perot) 13.5% (Clinton) 64.9% Wrong 13.6% Don't know 7.9%

Gas Tax: The federal budget deficit should be reduced by imposing a 50 cent per gallon increase in gasoline tax over five years?
Correct (Perot) 63.8% Wrong 27.8% Don't know 8.4%

Oil drilling: More areas should be opened for oil drilling?
Correct (Bush) 81% Wrong 7.5% Don't know 11.5%

Abortion: A constitutional amendment should ban abortions except in cases where a mother's life is in danger?
Correct (Bush) 64.2% Wrong 24.2% Don't know 11.5%

Health care: The nation should have universal health care paid for by employers?
Correct (Clinton) 63.1% Wrong 25.6% Don't know 11.2%

Capital gains: The capital gains tax should be cut in half?
Correct (Bush) 37.8% Wrong 43.3% Don't know 18.9%

National service: The government should pay college costs for young people who are willing to repay the debt with public service?
Correct (Clinton) 55.8% Wrong 28.5% Don't know 15.7%

APPENDIX A continued

Frequency Distribution of Issue Awareness Variable
Statewide Survey

Value	Freq.	Percent
0	30	3.6
1	48	5.7
2	83	9.8
3	158	18.6
4	158	18.7
5	169	20.0
6	119	14.0
7	80	9.5

Mean: 4.07
Standard Deviation: 1.811
Skewness -0.269
Kurtosis -0.572

n=845

Note: Values are correct number of answers for the 7 issue questions (see Table 6) with 1 point for each correct answer.

APPENDIX A continued

Issue Item Pearson Correlation Matrix
Statewide Survey

	TAX	GAS	OIL	ABORT	CARE	CAP
GAS	.23					
OIL	.13	.18				
ABORT	.18	.24	.20			
CARE	.10	.09	.21	.20		
CAP	.16	.22	.16	.17	.13	
SERVICE	.18	.29	.19	.12	.14	.20

ALPHA = .60

n = 845

APPENDIX B: PANEL SURVEY

Frequency Distribution of Issue Awareness Items: PANEL SURVEY
(n = 235)

Which candidate, George Bush, Bill Clinton or Ross Perot is more likely to favor the following statement:

Income Taxes: Taxes should be increased only for the richest Americans?

WAVE 1:	Correct (Clinton) 80.4%	Wrong 15.8%	Don't know 3.8%
WAVE 2:	80.9%	16.1%	3.0%

Gas Tax: Federal Gasoline taxes should be increased by 50 cents to pay for building new roads and bridges?

WAVE 1:	Correct (Perot) 41.7%	Wrong 45.1%	Don't know 13.2%
WAVE 2:	75.3%	20.4%	4.3%

Ozone Protection: The United States should go slow in cutting emissions to protect the Ozone layer?

WAVE 1:	Correct (Bush) 63.4%	Wrong 20.4%	Don't know 16.2%
WAVE 2:	77.4%	17.9%	4.7%

Abortion: A constitutional amendment should ban abortions except in cases where a mother's life is in danger?

WAVE 1:	Correct (Bush) 84.7%	Wrong 10.2%	Don't know 5.1%
WAVE 2:	82.1%	10.7%	7.2%

Budget deficit: People with incomes higher than $25,000 should pay income taxes on their Social Security benefits to help cut the budget deficit?

WAVE 1:	Correct (Perot) 30.2%	Wrong 50.7%	Don't know 19.1%
WAVE 2:	41.7%	40.4%	17.9%

Capital gains: The capital gains tax should be cut in half?

WAVE 1:	Correct (Bush) 50.2%	Wrong 32.4%	Don't know 17.4%
WAVE 2:	60.4%	28.1%	11.5%

Military spending: The defense budget has been cut as much as it should?

WAVE 1:	Correct (Bush) 84.7%	Wrong 9.3%	Don't know 6.0%
WAVE 2:	85.5%	10.2%	4.3%

National service: The government should pay college costs for young people who are willing to repay the debt with public service?

WAVE 1:	Correct (Clinton) 69.4%	Wrong 20.8%	Don't know 9.8%
WAVE 2:	73.6%	20.0%	6.4%

APPENDIX B continued

Frequency Distribution Of Issue Awareness Variable (Standardized)

WAVE 1

Value	Freq.	Percent
0	4	1.7
0.125	3	1.3
0.25	16	6.8
0.375	20	8.5
0.5	43	18.3
0.625	46	19.6
0.75	51	21.7
0.875	33	14.0
1.0	19	8.1
	235	100

MEAN: 0.615
STANDARD DEVIATION: 0.237
n = 360 (all participants)

MEAN: 0.631
STANDARD DEVIATION: 0.227
n = 235 (subset, also in Wave 2)

WAVE 2

Value	Freq.	Percent
0	3	1.3
0.125	3	1.3
0.25	9	3.8
0.375	15	6.4
0.5	29	12.3
0.625	31	13.2
0.75	46	19.6
0.875	49	20.9
1.0	50	21.3
	235	100

MEAN: 0.721
STANDARD DEVIATION: 0.237
n = 235

Note: Values are correct number of answers for the 8 issue questions (see Table 1) with 1 point for each correct answer, transformed to a standardized scale.

APPENDIX B continued

Issue Item Pearson Correlation Matrix
PANEL SURVEY

	TAX	GAS	OZONE	ABORT	BUDGET	CAPITAL
GAS	.14**					
OZONE	.26***	.24***				
ABORT	.20***	.18***	.23***			
BUDGET	.14**	.36***	.15**	.08		
CAPITAL	.19***	.24***	.18***	.15**	.15**	
MILITARY	.19***	.10*	.21***	.25***	.07	.13*
SERVICE	.14**	.12*	.16**	.18***	.03	.08

	MILITARY
SERVICE	.19***

ALPHA = .62

n = 360 1-tailed significance * = <.05 ** = <.01 *** = <.001

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Is It a Wall? A Tree? A Rope? Or an Elephant? --
Television News and Ads as Sources of Issue Information

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Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication,
Radio-TV Journalism Division
August 1993, Kansas City

The authors thank participants in JOMC 345 Seminar, Fall 1992, taught by Prof. Phil Meyer, who helped guide this project with their useful comments. This study is partially funded by an award from the University Research Council, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

ABSTRACT

Is It a Wall? A Tree? A Rope? Or an Elephant? -- Television News and Ads as Sources of Issue Information

Research that has described and compared the informative roles of televised political news and advertisements has produced inconsistent results. In some cases, only political ads are effective information sources, while in other cases, television news is judged more effective. This study, a replication of three other studies, explores the relationships between an audience's political knowledge and its attention to televised political news and ads. Secondary analyses of results from two surveys from the 1992 presidential election were used. Results from a series of hierarchical regressions indicate that television news is informative, while ads are uninformative. When compared with the replicated studies, it appears that televised news is a consistent information source for voters, while the information value of advertising varies from one campaign to another. This result contradicts the widely accepted generalization that televised political ads are more informative than television news.

"It was six men of Indostan
To learning much inclined
Who went to see the Elephant
(Though all of them were blind),
That each by observation
Might satisfy his mind....

...And so these men of Indostan
Disputed loud and long,
Each in his own opinion
Exceeding stiff and strong,
Though each was partly in the right,
And all were in the wrong!"

From The Blind Men and the Elephant
John Godfrey Saxe

Is It a Wall? A Tree? A Rope? Or an Elephant? -- Television News and Ads as Sources of Issue Information

In a Hindu fable, five blind men argued about what an elephant was like. One touched the body, and declared it a wall. Another grabbed a leg, and claimed it a tree. Another held the tail, so he argued it was a rope.

The 20-year inquiry regarding television news versus television ads as sources of issue information in U.S. political elections may be like that fable. Have researchers seen only part of the "elephant"? Early research concluded that TV political ads were informative and TV political news was not. But was that a mistake? And has it been a mistake to keep repeating the generalization?

In a series of studies, the authors have tried to answer some of these questions. In one study, we reported that TV election news was informative, but ads were not. In trying to replicate the study, we found that both were informative, but news was more informative than ads, and in another replication we found that while both were again informative, ads were more informative than news.

The objective of this paper is two-fold: 1) to collect as many pieces of evidence as possible, and 2) then piece everything together to have an overall picture of the role of television news and ads in voter learning about the issue stands of the candidates. We will first report new evidence: the results of two surveys, one in a three-county urban area and the other statewide, both conducted during the 1992 Bush-Clinton-Perot election campaign. More importantly, we will put the pieces together by comparing those two studies with our three previously reported studies.

I. Ads vs. News

One of the most commonly repeated generalizations in the research literature on political mass communication is the conclusion of Patterson and McClure (1976) that American voters learn issue information from television advertisements but NOT from television news. "Network news," they wrote (p. 54) "may be fascinating. It may be highly entertaining. But it is simply not informative." They were equally definite about TV commercials, both as to their ineffectiveness for projecting candidate images and their effective power in communicating issues. "Spot ads do not mold presidential images because voters are not easily misled," they concluded (p. 115). "But where image appeals fail, issue appeals work" (p. 116). The "information gain" related to candidates' issue positions "represents no small achievement" in their view (p. 117).

Synthesizers of the field have readily absorbed the Patterson-McClure conclusions into textbooks and review chapters. Kraus and Davis (1981) called it a "controversial but widely accepted analysis" that "people learned more from television advertising than from television news" (p. 278). Nimmo (1978, p.385) cited Patterson and McClure and reported that "television's political advertising, not news, is the key source of information."

Diamond (1980, pp.61-62) noted that "these findings were meant to be as much a criticism of television news as praise of television commercials." Graber (1989, pp. 195), on the other hand, argued for the apparent superiority of commercials because of their "simplicity of content, expert eye-ear appeal, and repetition of the message." O'Keefe and Atwood (1981, p. 339) said with a note of surprise that "even campaign commercials surpassed television network newscasts in providing voters with knowledge of the candidates' issue stand" (emphasis ours).

Convinced that network news is not as informative as televised commercials, Just, Crigler and Wallach (1990) decided not to study television news. They instead concentrated on commercials and televised debates in their experiment on issue learning.

The implication is significant. There has been a debate on whether the American public is rational, a debate considered "of vital importance for both the theory and practice of democracy" (Maass, 1966, Forward). Voters' issue awareness or the lack of it has been a key idea underlying the debate: an informed electorate implies rationality (Key, 1966; Page & Shapiro, 1992), the lack of it implies irrationality (Lazarsfeld, 1944; Campbell et al, 1960). Since a majority of people depend more on television for their news than on any other media (McLeod & McDonald, 1985), it is important to know whether voters receive most of their information from television news, which is supposed to inform, or from television ads, which are designed to sell.

Patterson and McClure's conclusions, therefore, deserve careful examination. Support for their conclusions came from two major sources: content analysis and audience survey. Based on the content analysis of evening network newscasts and the televised political ads, Sept. 18 - Nov. 6, 1972, Patterson and McClure found that ads provided four times more issue information than news did (as measured by length of time devoted to issue discussion). This finding was replicated by Kern (1989), who examined news and ads aired from 6 to 9 p.m. on the three major networks during the week prior to election day 1984.

Our North Carolina Study (Zhao, Chaffee, Bleske, & David, 1992), however, argued that content analysis of this kind, while valuable for other purposes, does not provide the evidence needed to answer the research question in hand. The sample of news and ads under both studies -- prime time on three networks during the last-minute campaign flurry -- tend to favor the ads while biased against issue reporting in news. Horse-race reporting and political ads are concentrated during that period. More issue reporting, news analysis, and live interviews occur elsewhere -- in weekend, late night, and morning shows such as 20/20, Nightline, Prime Time Live, and Face the Nation; and on other channels such as PBS, CNN, and Headline News; and earlier in the election year during primaries, conventions and daily news events such as news coverage of candidate reactions to the Los Angeles riot.

Further, mere message counts fail to take into account the quality of the message, selective exposure (Hyman & Sheatsley, 1947), and source credibility (Hoveland, Janis, & Kelley, 1953), all of which should play significant roles in message effectiveness. Advertising researchers have recognized that audience involvement level diminishes once advertisements are on (Krugman, 1965; Webb & Ray, 1979), and viewers don't trust ads even if they watch. It is possible, then, that one minute of news is more effective than one minute of ads because the news is more likely to be watched, attended to, and believed, a possibility supported by the experimental findings (Salmon, Reid, Pokrywczynski, & Willett, 1985) that news is more effective than ads even when the two have identical content. On the other hand, a counter-argument in favor of ads can be made: one minute of an advertisement may be more informative than one minute of a news item because ads are often carefully planned and executed with intention to sell a well-specified point, and the same ad is typically repeated many times.

Therefore, the major evidence has to come from audience research. But the evidence provided by Patterson and McClure (1976), almost the only evidence supporting the prevailing views in synthesizing literature, is less convincing than one might wish. Based on a sample of Onondaga County, New York (Syracuse and environs), the empirical tests underlying the authors' categorical generalizations consisted simply of comparing two groups, high and low exposure, to see if the high exposure group increased more in subjective certainty of issue awareness. For news, the high exposure group failed to meet the test; for ads, the high exposure group did become more certain of their issue perceptions. The measures of supposedly competing independent variables -- ads vs. news -- were not comparable. The dependent variable is self-perceived knowledge rather than actual issue knowledge. And the analysis is based on raw correlations that represent individual differences, not controlled tests of a causal model. Patterson and McClure's findings, therefore, may be spurious. It may well be, for example, the result of intellectual deficits in the audience that led to both heavy reliance on TV for news and lack of certainty about issue differences between Nixon and McGovern

Findings from other audience studies contradict Patterson and McClure's generalizations. Hofstetter, Zukin, and Buss (1978) used regression to analyze data from a national survey regarding the 1972 Nixon-McGovern election. They reported that, when demographic and political variables are controlled, neither network news nor political ads are associated with more political information. When all the controls are dropped, however, it appears that "*network news produced almost twice the effect on information than political advertising*" (p. 569).

Our Wisconsin Study (Zhao & Chaffee, 1986) was conducted in Dane County, Wisconsin, during the Reagan-Mondale presidential race of 1984. The study used issue knowledge (instead of self-confidence in issue knowledge) as the dependent variable and attention (instead of exposure) to news and to ads as the independent variables. We controlled for various variables including demographics, campaign activities, and general political knowledge. We reported that television news was informative, but television ads were not.

In a replication of the 1984 study, the Indiana Study (Zhao, Chaffee, & Bleske, 1993) found that both television news and ads were associated with higher issue awareness among respondents in Bloomington, Indiana, during the Bush-Dukakis race of 1988, but news was more effective than ads in predicting issue knowledge. The North Carolina Study (Zhao et al, 1992), conducted in Orange County, North Carolina, during the Helms-Gantt senate race, again indicated that both news and ads were associated with issue knowledge, but this time televised advertising appeared to be more informative than news.

In an ongoing study of the effects of political advertising on the 1992 election, West, Kern, and Alger (1992) noted that citizens interpret information they receive directly from candidates (advertising, debates and press conferences) and from mediating sources such as newspapers and television. Based on survey data, content analysis, and focus group interviews from four different communities during the presidential primaries, West et al (1992) concluded that, "In contemporary campaigns, both ads and news are vital to the process by which citizens construct electoral meanings and interpretations" (p. 23).

West et al's recent work, the Wisconsin Study (Zhao &

Chaffee, 1986), the Indiana Study (Zhao et al, 1993), and the North Carolina Study (Zhao et al, 1992) have not been published, and they, along with the Hofstetter, Zukin and Buss (1978) study, have yet to make an impact on the synthesizing literature.

Further, while these five studies have been consistently inconsistent with Patterson and McClure's generalization, they themselves have not offered a consistent picture about whether television news or ads are effective or ineffective, or which one is more effective than another. An overall picture of the elephant has yet to be pieced together.

For that purpose, our Wisconsin, Indiana and North Carolina studies can be used, since each used the same dependent variables (knowledge rather than self-perceived knowledge), the same independent variables (attention to television news and ads), and very similar regression models. Other studies cannot be compared with ours or with each other at the technical level because they used different concepts and statistical models (Patterson & McClure, 1976; West et al, 1992) or did not describe in detail their measures and models (Hofstetter, Zukin and Buss's, 1978).

But three parts alone may not be sufficient for putting together an elephant. This paper will add two more pieces. Also, the problem of generalizeability needs to be addressed -- while each of our three previous studies is from a different time and location, all of them are conducted during a two-candidate election and are based on a sample from a college town housing a leading state university (Madison, Wisconsin; Bloomington, Indiana; and Chapel Hill, North Carolina).

The two surveys we will report, therefore, were conducted during the three-way presidential election of 1992 and sampled two very different populations. One was an urban area (known as the Research Triangle in North Carolina) of three counties including some 15 median-sized or small cities/towns (including Raleigh, Durham and Chapel Hill, NC) that are adjacent to each other. The more than 525,000 residents in the area should resemble the average U.S. urban population better than any of the three university towns we have studied. The second was a statewide sample of North Carolina, including a large number of rural residents who have been missing in our previous studies. The two surveys, conducted three weeks apart during the same election and using different samples, may reveal another question the previous three studies could not explore: can the effects of news and ads vary within the same election?

II. A Survey in a Three-County Urban Area

Methods. We performed a secondary analysis of data collected the first week of October 1992. The sample included 360 randomly selected voting-age respondents selected by random digit dialing method for the three-county urban area. Students from a research methods class at the School of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill conducted the interviews by calling each number at least three times and asking to speak to the person in the household over the age of 18 who had the next birthday. To be as comparable as possible with the Wisconsin, Indiana, and North Carolina studies, we used issue knowledge as a dependent variable, and we employed independent measures that referred to attention to both ads and news specifically related to the presidential campaign. We introduced a number of control variables to reduce the danger of accepting spurious correlations as causal evidence.

Issue Awareness. The concept of issue awareness has earned a central position in political behavior research in recent decades, as party identification has declined in the American electorate. Policy voting appears, correlatively, to be on the rise (Nie, Verba and Petrocik, 1976). Learning how the candidates differ on major issues of public concern and campaign debate is an obvious necessary step if people are to live up to Key's (1966) principle that "voters are not fools." Part of the general theory underlying freedom of the press has been that it helps to provide the electorate with competing viewpoints on divisive issues, so that elections reflect the public will rather than the appeal of particular personalities.

Eight issue questions measured the respondents' perceptions of which candidate supported which issue statement, with each correct answer earning 1 point. The eight questions, which probed recall of the candidates' stands, are listed in Table 1, and the correlations among the items are listed in Table 2. Correct scores from the eight items were summed to create an index of issue awareness and its distribution is shown in Table 3.

Tables 1, 2, 3 about here

The Cronbach Alpha coefficient for this knowledge variable is 0.62, lower than the reliability coefficients, ranging 0.75 - 0.82, in the three previous studies. The bigger measurement error is not surprising, considering that each of the three previous studies asked respondents from a university town about two candidates' issue stands, while this survey asked less educated and politically less attentive respondents about three candidates' issue stands. Also, as is shown in Table 3, there is a compensation for the bigger measurement error -- the knowledge measure has a much less skewed distribution (skewness = -0.436, as compared with -0.921 to -1.122 in the three previous studies).

While our dependent variable is similar to the one used in the Indiana Study, it is, however, operationalized somewhat differently than the dependent variables constructed for the Wisconsin Study and the North Carolina Study, which measured issue knowledge on a Likert scale by asking each respondent to rate how strongly EACH candidate agreed or disagreed with a series of policy issue statements. In those two studies, an index was created that gave plus 1 point when the respondent correctly placed the candidate's issue stand in relation to the other candidate, and a negative 1 point if the respondent reversed the relationship, and 0 points if the respondent perceived no issue differences.

In the two studies reported in this paper, we will use the

Indiana study method of awarding points for correct answers. In reporting the results of the Indiana study (Zhao et al, 1993), we argued that if the knowledge measures have clear face validity in measuring the same concept, the somewhat different operationalizations add to the quality of the evidence that the replications and the original studies together can provide. We believe that if certain relationships are found in each of the five data sets (the two in this paper and the three studies we are replicating), the relationships then would appear to be robust against small variations in measurement instruments.

Attention to TV News and Ads.. The major independent variables of this study are attention to campaign news and attention to campaign ads. In probing for attention to news, the question asked, "How much attention, if any, have you paid to news stories about the presidential campaign when you saw them on television news?" Four response choices were given: a lot of attention, some attention, a little attention, or no attention.

To measure attention to ads, the question was, "How much attention, if any, have you paid to the campaign commercials on television during the presidential campaign?"

Again, our questions are similar to the questions in the Indiana Study but slightly different from the Wisconsin and North Carolina measures, which asked how much attention respondents paid to EACH candidate's news coverage on television, and to each candidate' campaign commercials. By using a total of four questions for the two major independent variables, those studies have a more reliable measure. Provided that both all our measures appear to have clear face validity in measuring the same concepts, we hope that, again, the somewhat different operationalizations will add to the quality of evidence produced by all the studies together.

Following the studies we are replicating, these independent variables refer to both news and ads about the specific political campaigns--not to news in general vs. ads for candidates, as was the case in the Patterson-McClure study. We see no reason to expect other news (e.g., international events, crime and accidents, weather and sports) to contribute to knowledge of candidates' issue differences; the inclusion of such "noise" in their news exposure measure may well have reduced Patterson and McClure's chances of finding a significant correlation.

Demographics and Voting Characteristics. One of the major criticisms against Patterson and McClure's (1976) data analysis has been that they did not control for any extraneous variables that may produce spurious correlations between the major independent and the dependent variables. To remove as much potential spuriousness as possible from this analysis, we followed the examples of our three other studies to develop several other variables for control and comparison.

Education and age have been found to relate to political communication and knowledge in prior studies and were controlled for in the studies we are replicating. They were measured in our study by standard self-report questions.

We will also control for gender, which was not controlled for in the Wisconsin (1984) study, but was used in the North Carolina (1990) and Indiana (1988) studies. Gender was coded as one dummy variable (1 if Female, 0 otherwise). Following the practice of the studies to be replicated, we will also control for two dummy variables for voting orientation (Vote for Bush: 1 if planning to vote for Bush, 0 otherwise; Vote for Clinton: 1 if planning to vote for Clinton, 0 otherwise). In similar fashion, we also controlled for party affiliation, whom the respondent voted for in the 1988 presidential race (coded 1 if they voted for Dukakis, 0 otherwise), and whether respondents reported that they were registered and planning to vote.

Because of the substantial number of missing values in income, a dummy variable (coded 1 if the value is missing, 0 otherwise) is entered into the regression equations, and mean score is substituted for the missing value on the original income variable, although any constant would produce the same result.

Data Analysis. Following the techniques used in the studies we are replicating, we tested the correlation between attention to news/ads with the dependent measure of issue awareness. Table 4 lists the intercorrelations for all the variables, which were entered into a series of hierarchical regressions. The results are in Table 5.

Tables 4 and 5 about here

The first equation (Equation 1) in Table 5 is a base model with issue awareness as the dependent variable and ten control variables (plus one dummy variable for missing data on the Income variable) as the independent variables. As shown in Table 5, several of these control variables make significant contributions to the explanation of variance even when all the others are controlled, and together they produce a multiple R-square of 0.273. It appears, then, that Equation 1 is a rigorous basis against which to assess any further increments to variance in issue awareness. In effect, it accounts for most of the individual differences that might create spurious relationships with our suspected causal variables. Further, because the multiple R-square of this equation (.273) is very close to its counterpart R-squares in the Wisconsin Study (.270), the North Carolina Study (.292), and the Indiana Study (.281), Equation 1 also provides a good basis for comparing the results of all four studies.

Equation 2 and 3 in Table 5 each adds, alternatively, a different attention variable onto the basis of Equation 1. Equation 2 adds attention to news as an independent variable. It produces a significant 2.04% increment to the variance explained (incremental F=11.98, df=1/347, p<.001). This result indicates a striking similarity between our data and the three studies we are replicating, the 1984 Wisconsin study reported a 2.1% incremental R-squared due to attention to TV news, the 1988 Indiana study reported 2.22% and the 1990 North Carolina study reported 2.14%.

Equation 3 in Table 5 substitutes attention to ads in the same position as attention to news was in Equation 2. It produces a significant 1.05% increment to the variance explained (incremental F=11.41, df=1/347, p<.001). The Wisconsin finding regarding the ineffectiveness of TV ads on issue awareness was not replicated in our data -- the counterpart increment reported in the Wisconsin study (1984 presidential election) was an insignificant 0.8%. The effectiveness of ads in this study, however, is smaller than the Indiana Study (1988 presidential election) finding of an incremental R-squared of 1.5% and is much smaller than the North Carolina (1990 U.S. senate election) finding of an incremental R-squared of 3.1%.

News appears to be more informative than ads in this study (2.04 vs. 1.05% in incremental R-squared). This finding contradicts the North Carolina study, which reported that news appeared to be less informative than ads, as indicated in the difference in incremental R-squares (incremental R-squares 2.14% vs. 3.10%). Instead, our result is closer to the Wisconsin study, which reported that television news is more informative than ads (incremental R-squared 2.1% vs. 0.8%).

III. A Statewide Survey

The Three-County Survey in October extended our previous college town studies to a larger urban area. Three weeks later we had an opportunity to extend it further to a statewide sample from one of the ten most populous states in the nation. North Carolina, with its largely rural economy, conservative tradition, relatively low per-capita income and education level, serves well to balance our previous studies that were limited to more urban, educated, wealthy and liberal respondents.

Methods. We performed a secondary analysis of data collected in the last week of October 1992. The sample included 841 randomly selected voting-age respondents selected by random digit dialing method for a whole state. The survey is semi-annually conducted as a joint venture of the School of Journalism and Mass Communication and the Institute for Research in the Social Sciences at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill. Students from the journalism school conducted the interviews as part of their class assignments in reporting and research methods. Each number is called at least four times and interviewers ask to speak to the person in the household over the age of 18 who had the next birthday. Data from the sample closely matched census demographics for the state on several indicators.

To be as comparable as possible with our three previous studies and Part 1 of this paper, we used basically the same techniques and variables as discussed in Part 1 of this paper. We will note the differences in the following text. Although this is a secondary analysis of data, we had some limited input into questions that were placed in the survey. Because of space limitations on the survey, not all of our requests were filled.

Issue Awareness. Seven issue questions measured the respondents' perceptions of which candidate supported which issue statement, with each correct answer earning 1 point.[1] The seven questions, which probed recall of the candidates' stands, are listed in Table 6, and the correlations among the items are listed in Table 7. The distribution of summed scores is shown in Table 8. We have speculated that more complex three-candidate questionnaire and less educated respondents may be responsible for bigger measurement error detected in the three-county survey presented earlier. If this speculation is correct, we should see an even lower reliability score in this statewide sample that includes a large number of even less educated rural residents. It is indeed lower (Cronbach Alpha = 0.60, vs. 0.62 in the three-county survey, and 0.75 to .82 in the previous three studies). As in the three-county survey, the bigger measurement error is compensated by a even less skewed distribution (Skewness = -0.269, as compared to -0.436 in the three-county survey and -0.921 to -1.122 in the three previous studies). The differences among the five studies in terms of reliability and distribution of the dependent measures provide an opportunity to test the robustness of the news/ads effect, provided that we find something consistent among five studies.

Tables 6, 7, 8 about here

Attention to TV News and Ads. Unlike Part 1, these major independent variables are measured with two questions as in the North Carolina (1990) study. Attention to TV campaign news was based on a pair of questions that asked respondents, "How much attention, if any, have you paid to televised news stories about Bill Clinton's (the second question substituted "George Bush's") stand on policy issues?" Four response choices were given: a lot of attention, some attention, a little attention, or no attention. The correlation between the two items is 0.65 (p<.001).

To measure attention to ads, the question was, "How much attention, if any, have you paid to Bill Clinton's (in the second question "George Bush's" was substituted) campaign commercials on television during the presidential campaign?" The correlation between items is 0.66 (p<.001).

While such measures, like the measurements used in all the other four studies, has clear face validity in measuring attention to news and ads, its specific wordings are different from any of the other studies. Further, because of the limited space in the questionnaire, we were unable to put in a third pair of questions that asked about Perot. These variations and shortcomings should provide a robustness test of news/ads effect against changes in operationalization, when the result of this study is compared with other four studies.

Demographics and Voting Characteristics. Among the control variables to be used in this study, three (age, education, and voting for whom) were controlled for in the other four studies; three (income, gender, and likelihood to vote) were controlled for in three of the other studies; and one (party ID) was used in the Indiana survey and the 3-county survey. Based on our practice of introducing a few new controls each time, we included employment status (working full time, party time, or unemployed/not working) and political orientation (conservative/liberal) for controls. These two appear appropriate considering that it was a recession year and the state has a conservative tradition. Since there are 81 missing cases in the income measure, a dummy variable was created for the missing cases (1 if missing, 0 otherwise) and their values in original income measure recoded to the mean.

Data Analysis

Table 9 lists the intercorrelations for all the variables, which were entered into a series of hierarchical regressions, which are summarized in Table 10.

Tables 9 and 10 about here

The first equation (Equation 1) in Table 10 is a base model with issue awareness as the dependent variable and twelve control variables (plus one dummy variable for missing data) as the independent variables. As shown in Table 10, several of these control variables make significant contributions to the explanation of variance even when all the others are controlled, and together they produce a multiple R-squared of .271. The multiple R-squared is very close to its counterpart R-squared in the Wisconsin Study (.270), the North Carolina Study (.292), the Indiana Study (.281), and Part 1 of this study (.273).

Equation 2 and 3 in Table 10 each adds, alternatively, a different attention variable onto the basis of Equation 1. Equation 2 adds Attention to News as an independent variable. It produces a significant 2.25% increment to the variance explained (incremental F=25.513, df=1/803, p<.0001). This result indicates a striking similarity between our data and the three studies we are replicating, the study of Mondale vs. Reagan reported a 2.1% incremental R-square due to attention to TV news, the Helms vs. Gantt study reported 2.14%, and the Bush vs. Dukakis study reported 2.22%, and Part 1 of this paper reported 2.04%. The similar attention measures in the five studies produced almost identical incremental R-squared, an indication that not only TV news may have been effective in these four elections in five places, but even the magnitudes of the effects may have been about the same.

Equation 3 in Table 5 substitutes Attention to Ads in the same position as Attention to News was in Equation 2. It produces a 0.34% increment to the variance explained, and it barely failed the conventional 0.05 test (incremental F=3.733, df=1/803, p<.0537). Since this study has by far the largest sample among the five studies (818 as compared with 252 to 416 in other four studies), the p-value indicates very small, if any, explanatory power of attention to ads. Indeed, the 0.34% incremental $R^{\text{-squared}}$ due to ads is by far the smallest among the five studies (Wisconsin: 0.8%; Indiana: 1.5%; North Carolina: 3.1%; Three County: 1.05%)

News is much more informative than ads in this study (2.3%

vs. 0.4% in incremental R-squared). This finding contradicts the North Carolina study (1990 election), which reported that news appeared to be less informative than ads, as indicated in the difference in incremental R-squared (2.14% vs. 3.10%). Instead, our result is more consistent with the Wisconsin study (1984 election), which reported that television news is more informative than ads (incremental R-squared 2.1% vs. 0.8%), which added an insignificant increment to the multiple R-squared.

The difference in ad effectiveness between the three-county survey (significant incremental increase in R-squared of 1.05%) and the statewide survey (insignificant increase in R-squared of 0.337%) is important. We notice two possible contributors: the sample and the time of the surveys. The three-county survey concentrates on urban population and the statewide survey includes a large number of rural residents. It is possible that urban residents, having more access to more diverse sources of information, can get more out of political advertisements than rural residents.

Also, the two surveys were conducted three weeks apart -- the three-county survey at the first week of October and the statewide survey at the last week of October. Because of the re-entry of Perot immediately before the three-county survey, all three candidates found it necessary to spend some air time defending and re-defining their and their opponents' issue positions. When the campaign was close to the end and changing voters' perception about candidates issue stands became more difficult, the candidates, particularly the underdogs, put more emphases on non-issue themes. Bush's ads talked about "trust", while Perot's ads tried to respond to the claims that it would be "risky" to put him in the White House. Also, the effectiveness of advertising campaign had to be hurt by the chaos and lack of focus in the Bush campaign during October (Wines, November 29, 1992).

IV. Putting Everything Together

Now it's time to put the parts together to look at whole shape of the elephant. Table 11 summarizes the major findings from the five studies. It first displays the basic information about the surveys and elections (Part 1). Then it lists which control variables were used in which studies and the information about the control blocks (Part 2), including the R-squared due to controls (Part 3). After we compare the independent and dependent measures and the basic statistics related to them (Part 4 and 5), Part 6 displays incremental R^2s due to news and ads. Since those incremental R^2s have been used in each of the five studies as the indicators of effects, we plotted them in Figure 1.

Table 11 and Figure 1 about here

As is shown in Figure 1, a pattern seems to emerge: news has not only been consistently informative, but the magnitudes of the effects as measured by incremental R-squares have been remarkably stable, 2.1% in 1984 in Wisconsin, 2.2% in 1988 in Indiana, 2.14%

in 1990 in North Carolina, 2.04% in Three-County Survey, and 2.25% in the Statewide Survey. As is shown in Table 11, the basis of this pattern appears solid. First, measurements are consistent. All the five studies measured attention to TV news as the independent variables and issue knowledge as the dependent variables. Second, the statistical models are comparable. Although each study employed some different control variables, there are clearly more overlaps than differences in the control blocks. More importantly, the total R^2s due to controls have remained stable across five studies (27.0%, 28.1%, 29.2%, 27.3%, 27.1%).

Yet there are plenty of variations among the studies, and the impact of news appears robust against all those variations, including place (Wisconsin, Indiana, or North Carolina), election (senatorial and presidential), sample (university towns, urban, and statewide), sample size (252 to 818), time of survey (before election or after election), specific control variables (four of the studies have at least one unique control variable), operationalization of the dependent measures (relative position or matching) and the independent measures (dummy variables, 1 item, or 2 items), reliability (.60 to .82) and skewness (-.27 to -1.12) of the dependent variables (although the two relatively low reliability scores are clearly compensated by the relatively better skewness scores).

Equally impressive in Figure 1 is that the effect of the ads jumps up and down from one study to another -- an insignificant

0.8% in 1984 in Wisconsin, 1.5% in 1988 in Indiana, 3.1% in 1990 in North Carolina, 1.1% in 1992 in Three-County area, and an insignificant 0.3% in 1992 in the Statewide survey. Obviously it is these jumps that caused the distinct findings from five studies regarding the relative strengths of news vs. ads.

The variations cannot be easily explained as artifact due to variations in research instruments. The question wordings regarding news and ads are strictly comparable within each study, although they differ slightly among studies. Since the performance of news appears remarkably stable despite the differences in research instruments, it is unlikely that the instrument variation would cause such a dramatic changes in statistics associated with advertising. The variations, it appears, are results of variations in advertising effectiveness from election to election and from place to place.

The Issue of Multicollinearity. Throughout the five studies, we have employed a consistent testing procedure -- alternately entering independent variables on top of a control block. Since the two major independent variables, attention to news and attention to ads, are moderately correlated with each other in all five studies, a question arises -- should we also enter the two variables simultaneously?

Results from such tests were summarized in Part 7 of Table 11. Attention to news was a significant predictor of knowledge in three of the five studies, while attention to ads was a significant predictor in one of the studies. In one of the studies ads outperformed the news, while the news outperformed ads in the other four times.

The problem of multicollinearity, however, makes it difficult for us to get more out of those statistics. When the incremental R^2 of ads goes up and down (Part 6 of Table 11), the incremental R^2 of news goes down and up in the opposite direction (Part 7 of Table 11), purely as a result of partialling out variances. What makes the interpretation even more complicated is that the correlation between attention to news and attention to ads also fluctuates from study to study. And, the degree of freedom associated with the independent variables is also different in the Wisconsin study (because of dummy coding), which further complicated the interpretation of the P tests presented in Part 7 of Table 11. Apparently, entering these independent variables at the same time is not very informative -- it tends to obscure the real pattern that appeared so clear when we entered the two variables alternately.

V. Discussion

In the 1980s and early 1990s, television news appears consistently informative; it appears as informative in one election or place as it is in another. On the other hand, effectiveness of advertising varies from election to election and from place to place -- it can be more or less informative than news, or not informative at all.

While contradicting Patterson and McClure's generalization (1976), this conclusion does not sound surprising if one

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considers how news and ads are managed in the United States. While campaign managers might have some control over structuring a campaign message for news dissemination, the broadcasting of that message on news shows is mediated by gatekeepers who function under professional constraints of balance, fairness, and the professional ideal that news shows have a responsibility to inform the public about election issues. While media critics may complain about campaign media blitzes, sound bites and spin doctors who massage messages (Kern, 1989), television news shows may offer a constant amount of issue content that helps audiences learn about the issues. Television news --driven by the battle for ratings-- may entertain and focus on campaign tactics or even be dominated at times by non-issue election content, yet it makes sense that over the long run, television news shows from CNN to talk shows provide a great amount of easily accessible and salient issue content.

If the informativeness of televised news tends to be relatively stable, it makes even more sense that the effectiveness of televised ads to inform audiences would vary greatly. Unlike the news, which is in the hands of hundreds or thousands of news people, ads are most often controlled by a small group of strategists or even a single candidate or campaign manager. A higher concentration of decision making power may easily lead to greater variations in content, sophistication, production, frequency, relevance, involvement, and other attributes that have been shown to contribute to audience learning about issues. Ads should not be expected to be informative if politicians focus on flag waving, yet the ads should be able to inform if politicians load their ads with issue content.

The sophistication of the audience may have also played a role. The purpose of news coverage is to inform with accuracy. Different audience members, politically sophisticated or not, should all benefit from news coverage. The purpose of political advertising is to sell candidates. And, unlike commercial advertising that is restricted in many ways by consumer protection laws, political advertising in the United States is protected by law as a form of free speech. Quite often candidates do use advertising to exaggerate and misrepresent their opponents' positions. A politically sophisticated viewer may still learn from such ads about candidates' issue positions. A less motivated viewer may not, and may even be misled or confused.

The influential Patterson and McClure study (1976) was not pictured in Figure 1 because, as we explained, they did not use the same measures and models, so their study is not technically comparable with ours. How that study would have fit into Figure 1 is difficult to say -- we cannot go back to 1972 to ask residents of Onondaga County new questions. But, looking at Figure 1, we may guess what would have happened -- 1972 and Onondaga may be one of those years and places that advertising was particularly informative, and the measurements and statistical models of Patterson and McClure may have mis-estimated the effect of news.

We all have limited information. In that sense all of us, including the best researchers, are blind. Like the blind men of the Hindu fable, we must make judgements on the basis of the limited information. So we propose, with much caution, that our five studies may have captured the general picture of the elephant -- the impact of TV news and ads on issue awareness of U.S. voters in the 1980s and early 1990s. Yet we would not be shocked if tomorrow another piece of evidence emerges that draws a different picture. And we are very curious to see if this elephant in any way resembles other elephants -- are our findings generalizable to other times and places?

Other important questions should be investigated. Why and under what conditions should television ads be informative or uninformative? Why is television news consistently informative? Could it be uninformative in some situations? Could it be even more informative? To some of these questions, we have offered some thoughts as tentative answers. Diverse research tools such as content analysis, audience research, and historical study are needed to test the validity of these answers and other possible answers.

Endnote

1. We proposed the knowledge questions in such a way that there was only one right choice (either Bush, Clinton, or Perot). But those questions had to be modified to meet the needs of other researchers working on unrelated projects. The modification did not affect any item except the one that asked respondents to judge which candidate favors the statement, "Taxes should be increased for those who earn more than $90,000 a year." While "Bush" is clearly a wrong choice and "Perot" is clearly right, it was not immediately clear how should "Clinton" be coded. Clinton explicitly proposed to raise tax for those who make more than $200,000 a year, but he also said he would not rule out the possibility of raising taxes for people with lower incomes ("I will not say, 'Read my lips'"). Since respondents were not asked to recall which candidate said this (which would make Clinton a clearly wrong choice), but instead to judge which candidate is likely to favor the statement, a voter reading between lines of Clinton's statements may reasonably conclude that he is as much in favor of tax increase as Perot is. So we chose to code "Clinton" as a correct answer, a choice supported by statistics obtained later. A clear majority (64.9%) of the respondents chose "Clinton" in answering this item. Among the four options -- delete the item altogether, code as a wrong answer, code as a partially correct answer, and code as a correct answer -- our choice gave the highest Cronbach's Alpha score (0.60 vs. 0.52 - 0.58 under other codings). Further, we ran regression equations using each of the different dependent codings. Each gave essentially the same estimates regarding the effects of news and ads.

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Table 1

Frequency Distribution of Issue Awareness Items: 3-County Survey
(n=360)

Which candidate, George Bush, Bill Clinton or Ross Perot is more likely to favor the following statement:

Income Taxes: Taxes should be increased only for the richest Americans?
Correct (Clinton) 76.9% Wrong 16.7% Don't know 6.4%

Gas Tax: Federal Gasoline taxes should be increased by 50 cents to pay for building new roads and bridges?
Correct (Perot) 40.3% Wrong 44.1% Don't know 15.6%

Ozone Protection: The United States should go slow in cutting emissions to protect the Ozone layer?
Correct (Bush) 63.9% Wrong 16.6% Don't know 19.4%

Abortion: A constitutional amendment should ban abortions except in cases where a mother's life is in danger?
Correct (Bush) 78.9% Wrong 11.7% Don't know 9.4%

Budget deficit: People with incomes higher than $25,000 should pay income taxes on their Social Security benefits to help cut the budget deficit?
Correct (Perot) 30% Wrong 50.8% Don't know 19.2%

Capital gains: The capital gains tax should be cut in half?
Correct (Bush) 51.4% Wrong 30.3% Don't know 18.3%

Military spending: The defense budget has been cut as much as it should?
Correct (Bush) 82.8% Wrong 9.7% Don't know 7.5%

National service: The government should pay college costs for young people who are willing to repay the debt with public service?
Correct (Clinton) 67.5% Wrong 19.4% Don't know 13.1%

Table 2

Issue Item Pearson Correlation Matrix
Three-County Survey

	TAX	GAS	OZONE	ABORT	BUDGET	CAPITAL
GAS	.14**					
OZONE	.26***	.24***				
ABORT	.20***	.18***	.23***			
BUDGET	.14**	.36***	.15**	.08		
CAPITAL	.19***	.24***	.18***	.15**	.15**	
MILITARY	.19***	.10*	.21***	.25***	.07	.13*
SERVICE	.14**	.12*	.16**	.18***	.03	.08

	MILITARY
SERVICE	.19***

ALPHA = .62

n = 360   1-tailed significance   * = <.05   ** = <.01   *** = <.001

Table 3

Frequency Distribution of Issue Awareness Variable (Standardized)

Value	Freq.	Percent
0	9	2.5
0.125	5	1.4
0.25	29	8.1
0.375	36	10.0
0.5	63	17.5
0.625	64	17.8
0.75	78	21.7
0.875	49	13.6
1.0	27	7.5

Mean: 0.615
Standard Deviation: 0.237
Skewness: -0.43631
Kurtosis: -0.26461
n=360

Note: Values are correct number of answers for the 8 issue questions (see Table 1) with 1 point for each correct answer, transformed to a standardized scale.

Table 4
Correlation Matrix for All Variables: Three-County Survey

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Issue Awareness								
2. Educ.	.41**							
3. Repub.	.02	.03						
4. Democrat	-.01	-.04	-.49**					
5. Age	-.08	-.06	.02	.06				
6. Gender	-.18**	-.19**	-.11	.13	.13			
7. Income	.23**	.31**	.16*	-.15*	.07	-.04		
8. Will Vote	.21**	.20**	.07	.16*	.17	-.00	.15*	
9. Vote for Bush	-.05	.01	.56**	-.32**	.08	-.08	.08	.16*
10 Vote for Clinton	.20**	.09	-.45**	.53**	.01	.04	-.11	.34**
11 Vote for Dukakis ('88)	.22**	.19**	-.29**	.41**	.14*	.04	-.00	.26**
12. Attentn to TV NEWS	.19**	.03	.02	.12	.02	-.02	.03	.12*
13. Attentn to TV ADS	.06	-.12	.07	.15*	.01	.04	-.04	.11

	9	10	11	12
10 Vote for Clinton	-.46**			
11 Vote for Dukakis	-.26**	.49**		
12. Attentn to TV NEWS	-.04	.14*	.09	
13. Attentn to TV ADS	.08	.03	.01	.46**

n = 360 1-tailed significance * = .01 ** = .001

Table 5

Issue Awareness by Communication Variables Controlling for Demographics and Voting Characteristics in a Three-County Area

(Hierarchical Regression)

	Eq. 1	Eq. 2	Eq. 3
Dependent Variable		Issue Awareness	
Independent Var.			
Age	-.06	-.06	-.05
Gender (Female)	-.10*	-.09*	-.10*
Education	.29**	.29**	.31**
Income	.13**	.13*	.13**
Income Dummy	-.14**	-.14**	-.14**
Republican	.05	.03	.04
Democrat	-.09	-.11	-.11
Will Vote	.08	.07	.07
Vote for Bush	-.03	-.03	-.04
Vote for Clinton	.15*	.13	.15*
Vote for Dukakis in 1988	.13*	.13*	.13*
Attention News		.15**	
Attention Ads			.11*
Total R Squared	.273**	.293**	.283**
Incremental R Squared due to Communication variables		.0204**	.0105*

* p<.05 ** p <.01 n=360
Note: Entries are standardized Beta weights. An empty cell indicates that the independent variable is not entered into the equation.

Table 6
Frequency Distribution of Issue Awareness Items: Statewide Survey
(n=845)

Which candidate, George Bush, Bill Clinton or Ross Perot is more likely to favor the following statement:

Income Taxes: Taxes should be raised for those households who earn more than $90,000 a year?
Correct (Perot) 13.5% (Clinton) 64.9% Wrong 13.6% Don't know 7.9%

Gas Tax: The federal budget deficit should be reduced by imposing a 50 cent per gallon increase in gasoline tax over five years?
Correct (Perot) 63.8% Wrong 27.8% Don't know 8.4%

Oil drilling: More areas should be opened for oil drilling?
Correct (Bush) 81% Wrong 7.5% Don't know 11.5%

Abortion: A constitutional amendment should ban abortions except in cases where a mother's life is in danger?
Correct (Bush) 64.2% Wrong 24.2% Don't know 11.5%

Health care: The nation should have universal health care paid for by employers?
Correct (Clinton) 63.1% Wrong 25.6% Don't know 11.2%

Capital gains: The capital gains tax should be cut in half?
Correct (Bush) 37.8% Wrong 43.3% Don't know 18.9%

National service: The government should pay college costs for young people who are willing to repay the debt with public service?
Correct (Clinton) 55.8% Wrong 28.5% Don't know 15.7%

Table 7

Issue Item Pearson Correlation Matrix
Statewide Survey

	TAX	GAS	OIL	ABORT	CARE	CAP
GAS	.23					
OIL	.13	.18				
ABORT	.18	.24	.20			
CARE	.10	.09	.21	.20		
CAP	.16	.22	.16	.17	.13	
SERVICE	.18	.29	.19	.12	.14	.20

ALPHA = .60

n = 845

Table 8

Frequency Distribution of Issue Awareness Variable
Statewide Survey

Value	Freq.	Percent
0	30	3.6
1	48	5.7
2	83	9.8
3	158	18.6
4	158	18.7
5	169	20.0
6	119	14.0
7	80	9.5

Mean: 4.07
Standard Deviation: 1.811
Skewness -0.269
Kurtosis -0.572

n=845

Note: Values are correct number of answers for the 7 issue questions (see Table 6) with 1 point for each correct answer.

Table 9
Correlation Matrix for All Variables: Statewide Survey

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Issue Awareness								
2. Attent. to TV Ads	.06							
3. Attent. to TV News	.24**	.50**						
4. Age	-.06	-.04	.06					
5. Gender	-.24**	.02	.01	.07				
6. Educat.	.39**	-.02	.12**	-.16**	-.07			
7. Work	.11*	-.02	.04	-.47**	-.24**	.17**		
8. Income	.31**	.04	.11*	-.04	-.18	.39**	.21**	
9. Repub.	.11**	.01	-.02	-.11*	-.02	.04	.05	.08
10 Democ.	-.09*	.11*	.10*	.11**	.14**	-.05	-.08	-.11**
11 Liberal	-.01	-.02	-.01	-.07	.12**	-.03	.01	-.12**
12 Will Vote	.29**	.11**	.25**	.23**	-.03	.28**	.02	.23**
13 Vote for Bush	.11*	.12**	.02	.03	-.07	.06	.02	.14**
14 Vote for Clinton	.10*	.01	.16**	.10*	.11*	.05	-.01	.01
15 Vote for Perot	.07	-.05	.00	-.05	-.14**	.10*	.05	.05

	9	10	11	12	13	14
10 Democ.	-.54**					
11 Liberal	-.33**	.29**				
12 Will Vote	.07	.08*	-.10*			
13 Vote for Bush	.46**	-.36**	-.43**	.30**		
14 Vote for Clinton	-.38**	.47**	.32**	.27**	-.45**	
15 Vote for Perot	-.03	-.13**	.04	.11**	-.24**	-.23**

n = 817 1-tailed significance * = .01 ** = .001

Table 10

Issue Awareness by Communication Variables Controlling for Demographics and Voting Characteristics in a Statewide Survey

(Hierarchical Regression)

	Eq. 1	Eq. 2	Eq. 3
Dependent Variable		Issue Awareness	
Independent Var.			
Income	.10**	.09**	.10**
Inc. dummy	-.07*	-.05	-.07*
Age	-.02	-.02	-.01
Gender(Female)	-.20***	-.20***	-.20***
Education	.28***	.27***	.28***
Work	-.04	-.03	-.04
Int. to Vote	.13**	.09*	.13**
Republican	.06	.06	.06
Democrat	-.06	-.07	-.07
Liberal	.08*	.08*	.08*
Clinton	.15**	.14**	.15**
Bush	.10*	.10*	.09
Perot	.05	.05	.05
Att. TV NEWS		.16***	
Att. TV ADS			.06
Total R Square	.271**	.293**	.274**
Incremental R Square due to Communication variables		.02246	.00337

* p<.05 ** p<.01 *** p<.001 n=818

Note: Entries are standardized Beta weights. An empty cell indicates that the independent variable is not entered into the equation.

Table 11
Effects of News and Ads on Issue Knowledge -- Summarizing Results of Five Studies

	Studies	Wisc.	IN	NC	3-County	State
1.	Sample	U.Town	U.Town	U.Town	Urban	Statewide
	Year	1984	1988	1990	1992	1992
	Time of Survey	Before	Before	After	Before	Before
	Election	Pres.	Pres.	Senate	Pres.	Pres.
	Number of Candidates	2	2	2	3	3
	Number of respondents	416	252	318	360	818
2.	Controls					
	Age	-**	-	-**	-	-
	Gender		=*	=	=	=***
	Race			=		
	Education	+*	+**	+**	+**	+***
	Income	+		+	+*	+**
	Class			+		
	Employment status					-
	Self-report knowledge	+**				
	General knowledge	+**				
	Party ID		=		=	=
	Pol. orientation (Lib)					+*
	Campaign interest	+				
	Campaign activity	+**				
	Intention to vote		+**	+	+	+**
	Vote for/against	=				
	Vote for whom	=	=	=*	=*	=*
	Vote for whom last time				=*	
3.	Total # of Controls	9	8	12	11	13
	R^2 due to controls (%)	27.0**	28.1**	29.2**	27.3**	27.1**
4.	Knowledge measure	Relat.	Match	Relat.	Match	Match
	Number of Questions	6	11	7	8	7
	Crobach Alpha	.75	.79	.82	.62	.60
	Skewness	-1.12	-1.04	-0.92	-0.44	-0.27
5.	Independent measures Operationalization:	3-dummy Attn.	1-item Attn.	2-item Attn.	1-item Attn.	2-item Attn.
6.	ΔR^2 due to news (%)	2.1**	2.2**	2.1**	2.0**	2.2**
	ΔR^2 due to ads (%)	0.8	1.5**	3.1**	1.1**	0.3
7.	ΔR^2 due to news after controlling ads (%)	1.5	1.1*	0.4	1.2**	1.9**
	ΔR^2 due to ads after controlling news (%)	0.1	0.4	1.4*	0.2	0.0

Table 11 (continued)

* : p<.05
**: p<.01
***: p<.001

Sample.
U.Town: Sample from a University town
Urban: Sample from Urban Area
Statewide: Statewide sample

Time of Survey.
Before: Shortly before the election day
After: Immediately after the election day

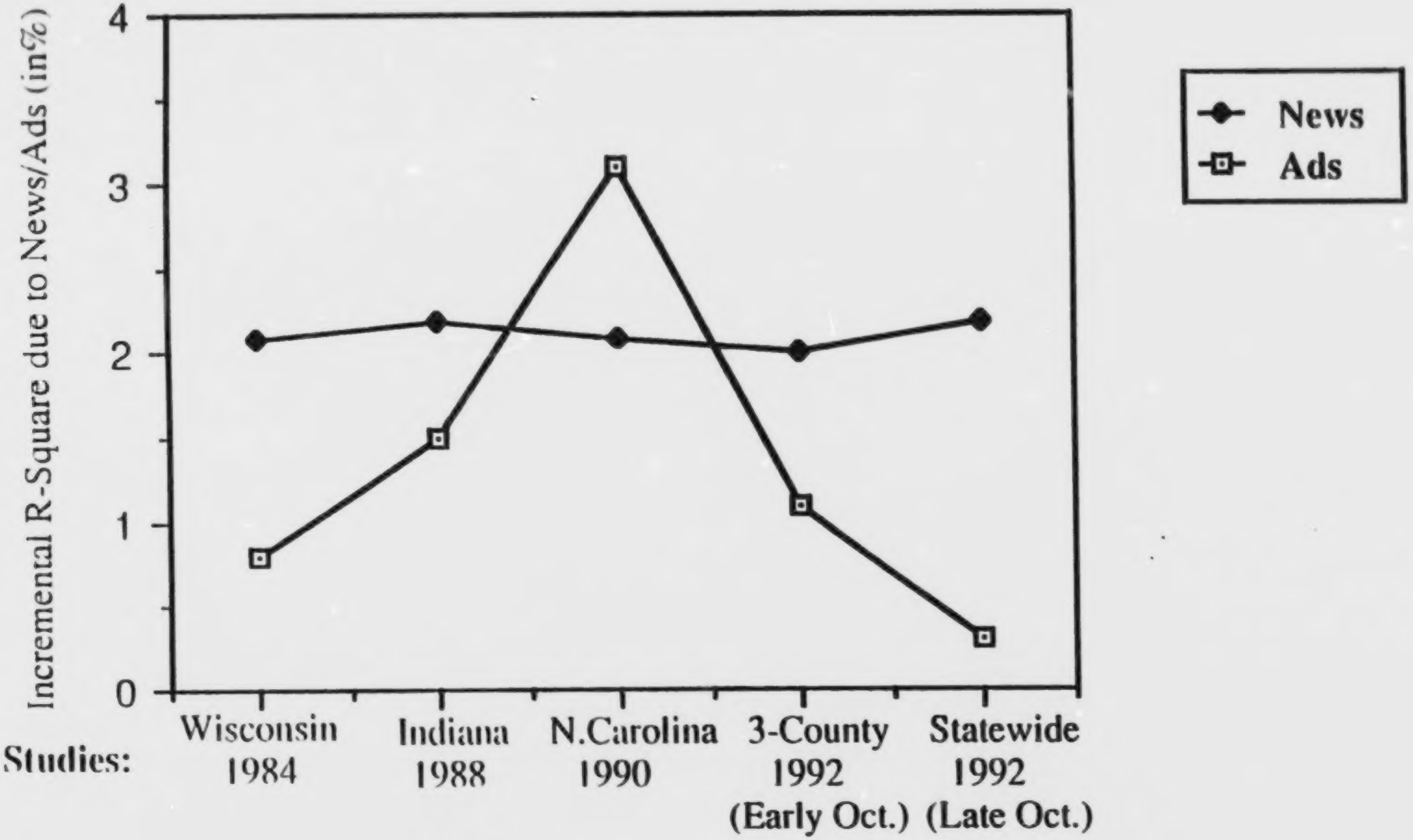
Controls (Note: Total number of controls includes dummy coding for variables with multiple categories and dummy coding to take into account missing cases)
+: control had a positive Beta in base equation
-: control had a negative Beta in base equation
=: direction is relative for categorical variable
empty cell: control not used in this study

Knowledge Measure.
Relat.: Relative position; 1 point if a Republican cadidate is seen as to the right of Democrat candidate, 0 point if two are seen as having the same position, -1 otherwise.

Match: Matching; 1 point if the right candidate(s) is named for the right statement, 0 point otherwise.

Independent Measures.
3-dummy: Three dummy variables for attention to news and three dummy variables for attention to ads.
1-item: One question for attention to news and one question for attention to ads.
2-item: Two questions for attention to news and two questions for attention to ads.

Figure 1: (Un)informativeness of TV News and Ads



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NEGATIVE POLITICAL ADVERTISEMENTS: EFFECTS OF POSITION, PERFORMANCE AND PERSONAL ATTACKS

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Association for Educators in Journalism and Mass Communication
76th Annual Convention
Kansas City, Missouri
August 11-14, 1993

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ABSTRACT

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Although not a recent invention, negative political ads have only recently become the weapon of choice among political candidates. Increased use of attack ads led to the emergence of the accepted typology of negative ads, issue versus image attacks. However, the negative ads' dominance of the most recent campaigns has rendered that categorization obsolete. This study attempted to extend the typology by considering the actual nature of the ad: was the candidate's position on an issue or past work performance under attack, or was the attack more personal in nature?

Negative advertisements using each type of attack were used in two surveys that were distributed to a candidate group, comprised of the Texas state senators and representatives, and a voters group, comprised of their legislative aides at the State Capitol. Since previous research has found trust to be the foundation of the voter/candidate relationship, the survey instruments were designed to elicit: first, whether both groups perceived trust to be an important component in the voters' choice of a candidate; and second, which type of attack most effectively eroded that trust. A coorientational approach was used to determine if the candidates and voters agreed in their perceptions of the effectiveness of the ads. It was postulated that attacks on position would be the most effective followed by performance and then personal attack ads.

While the efficacy of the ads followed the expected order, there was a surprising lack of symmetry between the voters' and candidates' perceptions of the importance of trust in the voter/candidate relationship. To voters, trust was important. To candidates, it was not.

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NEGATIVE POLITICAL ADVERTISEMENTS:
EFFECTS OF POSITION, PERFORMANCE AND PERSONAL ATTACKS

> It is not so well known, as it should be, that this federal gem John Adams, this apostle of the parsons of Connecticut, is not only a repulsive pedant, a gross hypocrite, and an unprincipled oppressor, but that he is, in private life, one of the most egregious fools upon the continent. When some future Clarendon shall illustrate and dignify the annals of the present age, he will assuredly express his surprise at the abrupt and absurd elevation of this despicable attorney. (Blum, 1973, p. 154)

So began James Callender's rather colorful damnation of President Adams. Originally published in 1800, it eloquently refutes the idea that negative political campaigning is the brainchild of late twentieth-century political consultants. Johnson-Cartee and Copeland view negative campaigning as an "American tradition," and cite as the first "direct attack" television advertisement one used by Kefauver against Eisenhower in 1952 (1991, p. 1-1). While these examples give evidence of early use of negative advertising, it is beyond dispute that this particular campaign technique was refined considerably and used more universally during the last decade than ever before.

There is general consensus among researchers that between 30 and 50 percent of political advertising in the last 10 years can be categorized as negative (Johnson-Cartee and Copeland, 1991; Kaid and Davidson, 1986; Taylor, 1986). Colford (1986) claimed that, of the more than $450 million spent in the 1986 United States House and Senate races, over 50 percent was used for negative political advertising. Joslyn's (1986) content analysis of 506 televised political commercials, which spanned several years, offices and parties, found that 23 percent were "blame-placing ads." Sabato (1981) estimated that a third of all spot commercials used in political campaigns during the late 1970s were negative advertisements and that the proportion was increasing. The start of that trend in increased use of negative advertising was identified by Surlin and Gordon (1977), who quoted the chairman of the Fair Campaign Practices Committee as saying that candidates in the 1972 presidential campaign used more ads attacking their opponents than they did positive ads about themselves.

There are three unrelated legal milestones at the root of the increase, according to Merritt (1984). First, Section 315 of the Communications Act of 1934 allows broadcasters to refuse product or service commercials that they feel are deceptive or misleading, but that right does not extend to political commercials. Second, the Supreme Court ruling in *New York Times v. Sullivan* in 1964 makes it difficult for any public figure, not just politicians, to successfully recover damages in defamation cases. Third, the 1976 Amendment to the Federal Election Campaign Act gives private individuals and political action committees (PACs) financial carte blanche in their efforts to support political candidates, as long as they are not in collusion with the candidates. In other words, individuals and PACs are limited in the amount of financial support they can give directly to a candidate, but they are not limited in the amount they can spend on behalf of the candidate.

Merritt found one of the statutes' and legislations' major ramifications to be the increase in PAC sponsorship of negative campaign spots. She claimed that, "spots produced by such independent supporters are often more aggressive than those produced by candidates themselves" (p. 28). Garramone (1984) identified causes for increased negative campaigning that are similar to those cited by Merritt: Heightened use of television in political campaigns, especially in races below the presidential level; and the growth of PACs, which often use negative advertising.

Another explanation of the trend, alluded to by Kern (1989), is that the prevalence of negative campaign ads is a legacy of the many political scandals of the 1970s and 1980s: "Advertising ... caters to public attitudes that are characterized [today] by a great deal of mistrust, not only of political institutions but also of candidate messages" (p. 16). Hill and Luttbeg also referred to "a steady decline in Americans' trust of government and its leaders" (1983, p. 121).

In his book, The Citizens' Presidency, Buchanan offered two divergent explanations for the public's disillusionment with the presidency that could be extrapolated to government in general.

> One view shared by some academics, most journalists who cover the presidency, and the general public is that diminished support stems from the succession of flawed, incompetent, and otherwise inadequate presidents who deserved neither support nor reelection .... Such events as Vietnam and Watergate not only led to the rejection of the chief executive but also spawned public skepticism and cynicism toward the presidency itself. (1987, p. 18)

The second view he proposed placed the blame for the current political malaise on the electorate, not the elected. "Authors of a host of textbooks, trade books, and interpretive articles blame declining support on unrealistic public expectations for presidential performance...Citizens want what no president has the power or expertise to deliver" (p. 19). In other words, at least some people are responsible for their own disillusionment with government because they held unreasonable expectations of the capabilities of the elected.

Wherever the blame lies, lack of faith in government has led to vigorous exercise of the people's right to know -- everything. In defense of that right, the public and private lives of today's candidates are more intensely and continuously scrutinized by the media. Some politicians, like Gary Hart, are driven from campaign races by the reporting of events that, to the public, show a lapse in moral judgement. Other candidates, like Vice President Dan Quayle, are elected in spite of the public's knowledge of incidents that allegedly show a lack of courage and integrity.

The consequences of the media serving as a campaign watchdog are multi-faceted. Qualified candidates could be excluded from participating in the political process because of past indiscretions, and less qualified candidates could win election due to the absence of serious competition. For example, many people felt that, in spite of his peccadillos, Gary Hart could have been a strong leader. Franklin D. Roosevelt and John F. Kennedy are now known to have been unfaithful husbands, but people generally remember them as having been good presidents.

The media are focusing public attention on the character of the candidates instead of on their issue stands and qualifications. It is more interesting to read about candidates plagiarizing speeches or see pictures of them on boats with sexy young women (who are not their wives) than to read about how they plan to lower the crime rate or see graphs of their budget proposals. To gain viewers, listeners or readers, the media cater to the people's interest. In so doing, the public is not receiving the information on the candidates' issue stands and qualifications that is needed to make intelligent voting decisions.

By the very nature of the coverage, the media are supporting the increased use of negative campaigning. Stories on the good things that candidates have done seldom make the news. It would seem that reporters are not assigned to research the volunteer efforts a candidate participated in during his early years, to ascertain that he never used drugs in college or to substantiate his claims of marital fidelity. What the reporters look for and, consequently, what is reported by the media is overwhelmingly negative in tone. This type of coverage could influence campaigns in two ways. First, candidates can use the media's reports of less-than-exemplary behavior against their opponents by incorporating them into their own negative ads. Second, the media's focus on character and the resulting negative tone of the coverage would seem to give candidates permission to focus their campaigns on character and adopt a negative tone.

The negative tone of the media coverage could be stimulating a sort of public cognitive dissonance. While many of today's adults experimented with drugs at some point in their lives, or have been unfaithful to their spouses, or have been less than honest on their tax forms, they do not want the leaders of their government to be guilty of these same shortcomings. Recent events in the country's history, such as Vietnam, Watergate and the Iran-Contra affair, had already eroded the public's image of its leaders as ideal or beyond reproach. With every known indiscretion in the candidates' past being publicized, people are confronted with the knowledge that the candidates share their personal shortcomings. That knowledge could be alienating the public from the electoral process.

A Realistic Approach

While negative campaign ads may not be the sole cause of the public's disenchantment with politics, as the prevalent campaign technique in today's elections, coping with negative ads is the key to the restoration of the candidate/voter relationship. If voters are withdrawing from politics in part because the campaigns offend them, changing the tone of campaigns by stopping, or at least decreasing, the use of offensive negative ads could be a first step towards bringing the public back into the electoral system. If candidates could be convinced that negative campaign ads were alienating instead of attracting voters, they would have less incentive to use those ads. By knowing which type of ad is most offensive to voters, candidates could begin to decrease the use of negative ads by eliminating that particular type of ad. Hypothetically, voters would be least likely to vote for a candidate whose ad offended them. Identifying the type of negative ad that stimulates the least amount of votes, i.e. determining the efficacy of negative ad types, would also identify the most offensive ad type.

The Typology

A basic typology of negative campaign ads was developed based on whether the ad attacked the candidates' issue stands or their image. The current widespread use of negative ads has rendered this typology obsolete. So many negative ads are being used that there are different ways of attacking both issues and images. This earlier typology also fails to consider attacks based on a candidate's previous professional experience.

This study proposes to extend the basic typology by determining the effects of different types of negative campaign advertisements distinguished solely on the nature of the attack: Is it an attack on position, performance or the person? Position attacks include those addressing candidates' stands or lack of stands on particular issues. Performance attacks include those addressing candidates' work records in both the public and private sectors. Personal attacks include those addressing candidates' personal characteristics, health or mental problems, family life and criminal history, and that of their family members.

The majority of the existing research on types of negative ads is limited to the issue versus image debate. The effectiveness of different types of issue and image ads has yet to be significantly addressed. Johnson-Cartee and Copeland (1991) claim:

> The electorate finds some areas acceptable for criticism (such as the candidate's voting record or position), and they find other areas unacceptable (such as attacks on marital status or religion). This area clearly needs to be explored using additional research designs. (p. 13)

In a similar vein, Garramone (1984) found that:

> The perceived truthfulness of a negative political commercial is positively related to its intended impact. This has pragmatic implications for the media practitioner, and also points to a need for further research to determine why certain themes are more persuasive than others. (p. 258)

Attempts to identify different dimensions of the issue versus image typology of negative campaign ads were undertaken by Gronbeck (1985), and Johnson-Cartee and Copeland (1991). Gronbeck categorized negative campaign ads as: implicative, including an implication or innuendo about the opponent but no outright attack; comparative, making an explicit comparison between candidates; and assaultive, evincing a direct and personal attack on the opponent's character, motives, associates or actions. Johnson-Cartee and Copeland distinguished three types of negative ads; direct attack, direct comparison, and implied comparison. This typology is similar to Gronbeck's, but the presence of candidate comparisons within the ads is emphasized:

> Direct attack ads only attack. Direct comparison ads specifically compare the sponsor and the opponent, and the sponsor always has the competitive edge in the comparison. Implied comparison ads are not negative in and of themselves, but it is the public's interpretation of those ads that give them their negative character. Implied comparison ads lure the voter into making the comparison between candidates. (p. 26)

While these researchers identify different kinds of issue and image ads, their categorizations do not focus purely on the nature of the attack itself; both include comparison between candidates as a dimension of the ad. A content analysis conducted by Benze and Declercq (1985) came closest to focusing only on the nature of the ad, but considered the presence rather than the effects of the nature of the ads. Their typology included attacks on an opponent's issue stances, performance and personality.

Their typology has been modified for this study to include attacks on position, performance and the person.

Research Questions

1. Because previous studies have shown that political ads attacking candidates' issue stands generate the least disapproval, the following research proposal is offered: For politically active publics, negative campaign attacks on a candidate's position stands are the most effective motivators of positive voter intentions.

2. Because political ads that attack a candidate's performance record could be expected to be more widely accepted than those attacking a candidate's personal life, the following research proposal is offered: For politically active publics, negative campaign attacks on a candidate's performance record are more effective at generating positive voter intentions than negative campaign attacks on a candidate's personal life, but are not as effective as ads that attack a candidate's position.

3. Because, in previous studies, voters have shown disapproval of political ads that attack a candidate

personally, the following research proposal is offered: For politically active publics, negative campaign attacks on a candidate's personal life are the least effective motivators of positive voter intentions.

The Variables

Knowledge of the factors involved is needed to understand the effect that different types of negative ads could have on the political system. There are four main variables underlying the extended typology of negative advertising: political involvement, nature of the ad, trustworthiness and voter intentions.

Voters bring a certain predisposition towards politics with them into a campaign that colors all of their subsequent political attitudes and behaviors. This political involvement is a contingent condition. The nature of the ad (position, performance or personal) would determine the amount of trust voters place in the candidate and is an intervening variable. Candidate trustworthiness is a dependent variable, since the level of trust that voters have for a candidate hinges on their own political involvement and the orientation of the ad. Voting intention is also a dependent variable as it is influenced, in sequence, by the voter's political involvement, the nature of the ad and the voter's perception of the candidate's trustworthiness.

Political Involvement →→→ Nature of the Ad →→→ Candidate Trustworthiness →→→ Voting Intention

Figure 1. Variable Relationship Model

Political involvement takes place on both a behavioral and a cognitive level. Behavioral political involvement is manifested in physical actions such as voting. Cognitive political involvement is more a mental exercise of the importance of politics to an individual. According to Hill and Luttbeg (1983), the downward trend in voter turn-out endangers the validity of a behavioral measure, such as voting, as the sole indicator of political involvement. Thus, this study will adopt both measures of the variable.

Research tying political involvement to race level has found that political advertising has a greater effect on vote change in low level elections (Jacobson, 1975; Rothschild, 1978; Swinyard and Coney, 1978). Based on the existing literature, Rothschild (1978) made three generalizations about political involvement: that national races are more involving than local races, with state races having the lowest level of involvement;

that close races are more involving than one-sided races; and that volatile issues and candidates tend to make races more involving. In an effort to contribute to the less extensive body of knowledge on high involvement publics, this study will concentrate on high involvement voters.

Regardless of its nature -- whether it is an attack on position, performance or the person -- there is both an affective and a cognitive response to a negative campaign ad. Surlin and Gordon described the political process itself as, "a mixture of cognition and evaluation, of belief and attitude, of percept and affect which is probably best described as the individual's cognitive and affective map of politics" (1977, p. 89). Elder and Cobb subsequently defined affect as, "the direction or intensity of a person's feelings toward an object, i.e., whether the person views the object positively or negatively and to what degree" (1983, p. 37). They defined cognition as, "the meaning a person associates with the object...all that a person 'knows' about what the object stands for" (1983, p. 37). The aim of this study is to determine which type of attack most effectively stimulates both an affective and a cognitive response in a high involvement public.

The effectiveness of a negative appeal is determined by how well it inhibits the development of a "trusting relationship" between candidate and voter (Kern, 1989). Both affect and cognition are vital to building trust. The affective component is the actual emotional tie, while the cognitive side entails "qualification, demonstrating competence and experience that a candidate can do the job the voters want done" (Fenno, 1978, p. 196). Fenno (1978) designated "bonds of trust" as the foundation of the voter-candidate tie and Kern (1989) also lists "attempting to make one's own candidate more trusted than the opponent" (p. 85) as the major task of a campaign.

In their contribution to the discussion of trust, Garramone and Smith (1984) make the distinction that it is the perceived truthfulness of an ad that determines its impact. They found that, "perceptions of a communication are influenced by trustworthiness" (1984, p. 772). Regardless of the ad's veracity, if the voter perceives the ad as dishonest the candidate sponsoring the ad will be perceived as less trustworthy, and the ad will have the "boomerang" effect of undermining the ad's sponsor instead of the candidate targeted.

From his content analysis of televised campaign ads, Joslyn (1980) determined that, "though many factors certainly influence individual voting decisions and aggregate electoral results, the content of one's advertisements does influence these decisions" (p. 96). Because of their alleged impact on voting intention and, consequently, who is elected to run the government, political ads are a vital component in a democracy.

Method

A comment from Hill suggested the coorientation model as an approach for identifying the most effective type of negative campaign ad: "Stimulus ads need to be examined to test whether voters' perceptions are consistent with advertisers' intentions" (1989, p. 21). Basically, the coorientation approach allows for the comparison of voters' perceptions of the most effective type of negative ad to the candidates' perception of the most effective type of negative ad. The candidates' opinion of the most effective ad type is, in essence, what they believe the voters want. So this approach would seek to determine the level of agreement between the voters' perception and the candidates' perception of different kinds of negative ads.

First introduced by Newcomb in 1953, the coorientation concept considers the mutual orientation of two individuals or groups to some object (Pearson, 1989). In this case, the groups would be candidates and voters, and the object would be different types of negative campaign ads. Of interest is each group's perception of negative campaign ads, and their perception of the other group's perception of the ads. A number of different scenarios can result (adapted from Broom, 1977):

1. There can be a discrepancy between candidate and voter perceptions of negative campaign spots. That is, the spots have different connotations to the two sides of the relationship; they are not perceiving the same thing when they see a negative campaign ad.

2. There can be a discrepancy between the candidates' perception of the voters' perception of the spots and what the voters actually think. The candidates inaccurately estimate how voters perceive the ads.

3. There is a discrepancy between the voters' perception of the candidates' perception of the spots and the candidate's actual perception. The voters inaccurately estimate the candidates' perception of the ads.

In short, the coorientation perspective acts as a consensus builder by identifying areas of agreement and disagreement between two related entities. A "consensus of understanding" (Broom, 1977, p. 111) about the efficacy of different types of negative campaign ads is necessary to mend the relationship between politicians and the public.

Integral to the coorientation approach is a series of questions (Pearson, 1989) including: How similar are each group's beliefs and evaluations of negative campaign ads and their efficacy? What is the degree of similarity or congruence that a group perceives it has with the other group's beliefs and evaluations? How accurate are these perceptions of the other group's beliefs and evaluations? Scheff (1967) developed a typology of possible outcomes based on those queries: monolithic consensus, where all groups have similar evaluations of the ads and their efficacy, and accurately perceive that agreement; pluralistic ignorance, where groups have similar evaluations but perceive that they do not; dissensus, where groups have dissimilar evaluations and accurately perceive that disagreement; and false consensus, where groups have dissimilar evaluations but perceive that they agree.

The relationship between the groups is defined along three dimensions (Broom, 1977): Accuracy is the extent to which group one's estimate of group two's views match what group two really thinks, and vice versa. Mutual understanding is the extent to which group one's definition of the object is similar to group two's definition, and vice versa. Congruency is the extent to which group one's estimate of group two's views coincide with group two's actual views.

A coorientational explanation of negative political advertising would be:

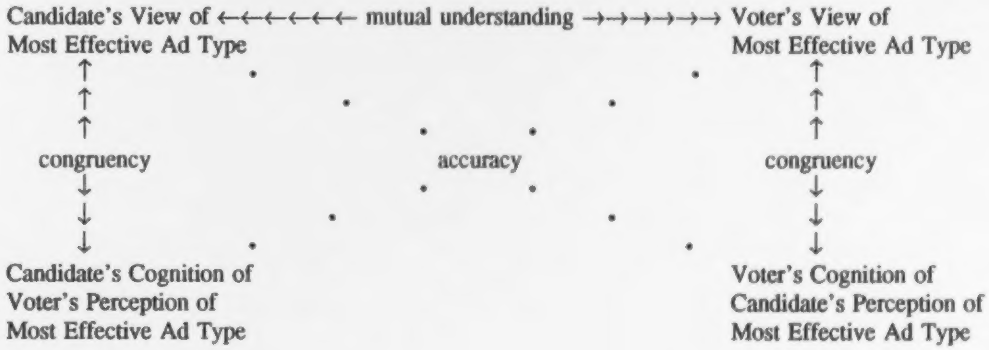
Candidate's View of Most Effective Ad Type
mutual understanding
Voter's View of Most Effective Ad Type
congruency
accuracy
congruency
Candidate's Cognition of Voter's Perception of Most Effective Ad Type
Voter's Cognition of Candidate's Perception of Most Effective Ad Type

Figure 2. A coorientation approach to negative political advertising

Two surveys were administered in order to obtain the data needed to apply this coorientation model. The legislative staff members from the Texas Capitol were used for the voters group. The legislators -- state senators and representatives -- were used for the candidate group.

The Respondents

The voter group, comprised of legislative staff members in the Texas House of Representatives and Senate, was selected as a politically involved public. These staff members are generally either legislative or administrative aides. The nature of their positions infers a relatively high degree of political involvement, which is in keeping with the goals of this study. This group of subjects could also be expected to represent various levels of age and education as well as a cross-section of political affiliations. While they are not necessarily representative of the population at large, they could be said to be representative of politically involved citizens. Each of the 594 legislative staff members at the Capitol received a copy of the questionnaire.

The candidate group was comprised of legislators in the Texas House of Representatives and Senate. Because of their positions as elected representatives of the public, they can provide insight into the candidates' perceptions of the voters' view of the most effective type of political advertisement. Surveying all members in both legislative bodies ensured various levels of incumbency and a cross-section of political affiliations. While this group of legislators could be said to represent state and even local elected officials, they are not representative of national elected officials. Each of the 180 legislators at the Capitol received a copy of the questionnaire.

The Instrument

The research instrument was a self-administered questionnaire hand-delivered to the respondents' offices at the Capitol over the course of two days. Questionnaires were returned through the Capitol mail service. Responses were made using a semantic differential scale adapted from Johnson-Cartee and Copeland (1991).

The voter group's survey was divided into four parts. Part one was designed to obtain information on two dimensions of political involvement: behavioral involvement as expressed by their incidence of voting in national, state, and local level elections; and attitudinal involvement as expressed by the respondents' analysis of their political awareness at a national, state and local level.

Part two was designed to measure the level of trust inspired by the three different types of negative ads. Six negative ads were developed from the text of actual televised ads used in out-of-state elections. Three of the six ads were used virtually verbatim; the other three required significant editing to be used in a text-only format. All six simulated candidate names were selected to control for bias, including unusual or ethnically oriented names.

The six ads were divided into two sets, with an example of each type of negative political ad in each set of ads. In other words, there were two ads using position attacks, two using performance attacks and two using personal attacks. Two different versions of each ad type were used to control for any bias introduced by the topic discussed in the ad. There were three different ads on each questionnaire, one representing each type of attack. The three different ads were rotated within the questionnaire to control for any bias introduced by the order of presentation. Following is the text for the ads used in the survey. The first ads in each category are those used verbatim, the second ads are more substantially edited.

Attacks on position:

> 1. Scott Moore says, if elected governor, he would cut the budget. But here's where he'd have to cut. Our elderly: 177,000 elderly and disabled cut from meal programs. Our workers: 22,000 jobs cut in road construction. Our children: cutbacks in the new education program. Medical care for the elderly -- CUT. Eyeglasses for kids and seniors -- CUT. Child abuse programs -- CUT. The cuts Scott Moore would have to make. Doesn't he know? Or doesn't he care?
>
> 2. Without warning, the company where you've worked for years shuts down -- taking your job and your security with it. For most of us, it's about the worst nightmare there is. Shouldn't there be a law to give you and your community some protection from a situation like that? Gubernatorial candidate Mark Andrews says "no." Imagine that kind of insensitivity from a candidate for governor. Worse yet, imagine that kind of insensitivity from your governor.

Attacks on performance:

> 1. Who is Stephen Adams? He's the land commissioner who turned our land into developments. The paid political official who opened new businesses outside of the state. The treasurer who put our money in banks that give him personal loans for his businesses. The office holder who grows rich in public

service. He's the politician who helped raise your taxes. Stephen Adams's not a governor for our state.

2. Roy James wants you to believe he supported tax cuts while he was in the legislature. The truth is that James helped ram through a 20 percent increase in property taxes, and a 40 percent increase in his own salary. He helped push the state so far into debt that our credit rating has dropped twice in the last 3 years. The question is this: Can the man who helped drive our state to its knees financially also be the man to put it back on its feet?

Attacks on the person:

1. Testing Mike Renfro's qualifications for governor isn't a job for the voters. It's a task for a lie detector. While Renfro denies he left public office in disgrace, the truth is he resigned after having his performance condemned as disloyal, devious, and inexcusable. Later, Renfro made a propaganda film. He claims to have made thousands of dollars on the movie. Yet he failed to list this money on his federal income tax statement. Now Renfro wants to be governor. But if a man won't tell you the truth before he's elected, when can you believe him?

2. There is no easy way to raise the issue of character in the governor's race. But it is an issue, and it must be raised. In the case of candidate Richard Shelby, the newspaper headlines tell the story: "Shelby Scandal: State Cars Put to Private Use," "Shelby Rebuked for Wrongful Conduct," "Shelby Denies He Used State Car for Female Reporter," "A Hot Player in Vegas: Rich Richard's $31,000 Sweep," "District Attorney Investigating Shelby." Enough said?

Two measures were presented following the text of each ad. The first asked for the respondent's ranking of the candidate on an index of several dimensions influencing trust including how believable, fair, annoying, convincing, and tasteful the respondent thought the candidate was. The second asked for the respondent's ranking of the overall trustworthiness of the candidate. The instruction was: Please indicate how trustworthy you think (candidate name) is as a candidate.

Part three asked for the respondent's voting intention based on the ads. In order to rank the ads' effectiveness at stimulating votes, the respondents were presented with the three possible pairings of candidate names and were asked to select one candidate in each pairing. Part four asked for demographic information including sex, age, level of education, and partisanship.

The candidates' questionnaire consisted of three parts. Part one used three of the same six ads followed by the same two trust measures that were used on the voter's version. However, the questions asked the legislators to rank their perception of the voters' responses. The first question asked, "In your opinion, how accurately will the voters think each item is in describing the ad about (candidate name)?" Part two used the same measure as the staff's questionnaire, but asked the legislators to rank their perception of the voters' voting intentions based on the ads. Again, all three candidate combinations were presented and they were asked to select one name from each pair. Part three asked for demographic information including sex, the number of terms served (level of incumbency), and partisanship.

Results

Of the 594 questionnaires distributed to staff members, 190 were returned, giving a response rate of 32 percent. Of the 180 questionnaires distributed to legislators, 50 were returned, giving a response rate of 28 percent. Neither group of respondents was thought to be representative of a larger societal group. Because this study was concerned with defining relationships rather than with generalizing to a population, the low response rates are not a problem.

Univariate Statistics

The study was designed to detect a relationship between political involvement, nature of the ad, candidate trustworthiness and voting intention. Since every subject was exposed to each type of ad, that variable, nature of the ad, was controlled for within the questionnaire. Developing indices ranking political involvement and candidate trustworthiness, and determining the number of votes received by each ad type were the first steps of analysis.

There were two questions related to political involvement on the voters' survey. The first item was a measure of behavior.

1. During the last five years have you:
    a. voted in a national election? yes____ no ____
    b. voted in a national election other than for president or vice-president?
    yes____ no ____
    c. voted in a state election? yes____ no ____
    d. voted in a state election other than for governor or lieutenant governor?
    yes____ no ____
    e. voted in a local election? yes____ no ____
    f. voted in a local election other than for mayor?
    yes____ no ____

Factor analysis showed that these responses all loaded significantly on the same factor. They were then summed to create an index of political involvement behavior (PIB).

The second question was a measure of attitude.

2. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.
a. I avoid politics in any form. disagree agree
1 2 3 4 5
b. For major elections (president, governor and mayor):
I know the names but not the views of the candidates.
disagree agree
1 2 3 4 5
I know the names and the views of the candidates.
disagree agree
1 2 3 4 5
c. For non-major elections (congresspersons, state legislators, city council members, etc.):
I know the names but not the views of the candidates.
disagree agree
1 2 3 4 5
I know the names and the views of the candidates.
disagree agree
1 2 3 4 5

Factor analysis showed that, of these responses, only those claiming knowledge of the names but not the views of the candidates loaded significantly on a single factor. Since high attitudinal political involvement would require more than just name recognition for the candidates, this measure of involvement was inconclusive.

There were two questions related to candidate trustworthiness on both the voters' and the candidates' questionnaires. The first item measured several dimensions of trust.

1. Please indicate how accurate you think each term is in describing the ad about (candidate name).

	not accurate					accurate	
Believable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Fair	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Annoying	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Convincing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Tasteful	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

The second question asked for a general ranking of trustworthiness.

2. Please indicate how trustworthy you think (candidate name) is as a candidate.
not trustworthy trustworthy
1 2 3 4 5 6 7

These questions appeared after the text for each type of ad on both the voters' and candidates' surveys. Factor analyses were conducted on the responses to both of these measures for each type of ad. The results were the same in every ad category for both voters and candidates: The dimension, "annoying," and the general trustworthiness score were insignificant. For both groups of respondents, a trustworthiness index was developed for each ad type by summing the responses to the remaining dimensions of trustworthiness: believable, fair, convincing, and tasteful. Because the responses to the general ranking of trustworthiness were outside the cluster in the factor analyses for all three ad types on both the voters' and candidates' surveys, that variable was retained as a separate measure of candidate trustworthiness.

There were two questions related to voting intention on the voters' questionnaire. The first item determined whether or not the respondent would participate in the election. (This question was irrelevant for the candidates and was, therefore, not included on their questionnaire.)

1. Would you vote in the primary election involving candidates A, B, and C?
yes____ no ____

Since two versions of the questionnaire were distributed, responses to this voting intention question were cross-tabulated with questionnaire version to determine whether or not the version had any effect on voting participation. Version one of the questionnaire included the ad text that was used verbatim; version two included the ad text that required more substantial editing. Of 184 valid responses, 149 indicated that they would vote in the election. Of those who would not vote, 18 indicated they would not vote on version one and 17 indicated they would not vote on version two. Which version of the questionnaire a respondent received was insignificant.

The second voting intention question presented every possible combination of candidates and asked for the respondents' to vote for a candidate in each pairing. This response style was chosen in order to see which type of ad generated the most number of votes, and by how much that ad type led.

2. Consider the campaign ads you read about candidates A, B, and C. Imagine that the election was only between the two candidates named in each of the following combinations. Circle the name of the candidate you would vote for in EACH pair.

Candidate A vs. Candidate B
Candidate B vs. Candidate C
Candidate C vs. Candidate A

Each candidate could receive 0, 1, or 2 votes on each questionnaire. Because each candidate was portrayed in only one type of ad, the respondents were actually voting for a specific ad type by voting for a particular candidate.

Frequencies were run on this voting intention question. For both groups of respondents, the position attack ads garnered the largest number of votes followed by the performance attack ads and the personal attack ads. These results support all three of the research questions.

[Insert Table 1 about here.]

Bivariate Statistics

For both the voters' and the candidates' surveys, the voting intention variable for each ad type was cross tabulated with both trust variables. For the voters' survey, at least one measure of candidate trustworthiness proved to be statistically significant for every ad type.

Perceived trustworthiness had the strongest effect on voting intention for the position attack ads. Rankings of general trustworthiness were significantly related to voting intention. For example, 72.1 percent of the respondents who would vote for these candidates gave them high trustworthiness ratings compared to 36.8 percent who gave them low trustworthiness scores. The trustworthiness index was not significantly related to voting intentions for position ads.

[Insert Table 2 about here.]

For voting intentions on the performance attack ads, the general trustworthiness ranking was insignificant, but the index was significantly related to voting intention. In keeping with the second research proposal, 41.3 percent of the respondents who would vote for these candidates gave them moderate trustworthiness ratings compared to 15.7 percent who gave high rankings and 15.9 percent who gave low rankings.

[Insert Table 3 about here.]

For voting intention on the personal attack ads, the general trustworthiness ranking was statistically significant. Of the respondents who would vote for these ads, 53.3 percent ranked them high in trustworthiness compared to 28.4 percent who ranked them low. It is interesting to note that, in support of the third research proposal, 71.6 percent of the respondents ranked these ads low in trustworthiness and would not vote for these candidates. The trustworthiness index was insignificant for these ads.

[Insert Table 4 about here.]

When voting intention by ad type was cross tabulated with the trustworthiness variables for the candidates' survey, there were no statistically significant results.

Multivariate Statistics

The measure of political involvement, PIB, was cross tabulated with the trustworthiness/voting intention relationship for each ad type. Since political involvement was not relevant on the candidates' questionnaire, these three-way analyses were conducted only on the voters' responses.

For position ads at the highest level of PIB, voting intention was significantly related to the trustworthiness index. However, an inverse relationship was represented. Of the respondents who would vote for these candidates, 81.3 percent ranked them low in trustworthiness compared to 65.4 percent who gave moderate ratings and 40.6 percent who gave high ratings. For respondents low in PIB, there was not a significant relationship between the trustworthiness index and voting intention.

[Insert Table 5 about here.]

For the position ads at the highest level of PIB, voting intention was also significantly related to the general trustworthiness ranking. The largest group of respondents who would vote for these candidates, 74.2 percent, ranked position ads high in trustworthiness as compared to 33.3 percent, who ranked them low. For respondents low in PIB, there was not a significant relationship between the general trustworthiness ranking and voting intention.

[Insert Table 6 about here.]

For performance ads at the highest level of PIB, voting intention was also significantly related to the trustworthiness index. In a pattern similar to that found in the bivariate analysis, the largest percentage of respondents who would vote for these candidates, 34.4 percent, gave them moderate trustworthiness ratings compared to 13.3 percent who gave low rankings and 10.3 percent who gave high rankings. For respondents low in PIB, there was not a significant relationship between the trustworthiness index and voting intention.

[Insert Table 7 about here.]

There was not a significant relationship between voting intention and the general trustworthiness rankings at any level of PIB for the performance ads.

For the personal ads, the results for the relationship between voting intention and the trustworthiness index were insignificant at both levels of PIB. However, there was a significant relationship between voting intention and the general trustworthiness rankings. Of the respondents who would vote for these candidates, 55.6 percent ranked them high in trustworthiness compared to 29.5 percent who ranked them low. In support of the third research proposal, it is interesting to note again that 70.5 percent of the respondents ranked these candidates low in trustworthiness and would not vote for them. For respondents low in PIB, there was not a significant relationship between the general trustworthiness ranking and voting intention.

[Insert Table 8 about here.]

See Appendix A for a better understanding of which trustworthiness tests were significant for which ad types.

Discussion

Before discussing the results and their implications, it is important to mention the limitations of this study. The original goal was to examine the effects of negative advertising on a particular campaign, such as the 1990 gubernatorial election in Texas. Since some people respond in a very visceral way to some candidates, and controlling for that response was beyond the scope of this study, anonymous candidates and test ads were used.

Timing was crucial to the response rate of this endeavor. During 1991, the Texas legislature was in session from January through May, recessed during the month of June, and reconvened for a special session in July. The voters' survey was distributed during the early part of May, when the session was particularly busy. The candidates' survey was distributed during the latter part of June and early part of July, when the members were either not in their Austin offices or were beginning the special session. The response rates on both surveys could be attributed, at least in part, to these timing problems.

The legislative staff members are not necessarily representative of the politically involved public. While their work exposes them to politics on a daily basis, they do not necessarily attend to political matters beyond the confines of their jobs. This analysis of political involvement did not indicate a level of attitudinal involvement beyond that which could be expected from the general public. However, the staff members' political behavior, as evidenced by their voting history, was more active than would be expected for the general voting public, given the current trend toward decreased voter turnout. The inherent problem in self-reporting, giving what is perceived as the correct answer rather than what is the true answer, could have influenced some respondents to indicate that they were more politically active than they truly are.

Including all three ad types on each questionnaire basically controlled for the nature of the ad. A different approach would have been to distribute three separate questionnaires so that each respondent was exposed to only one of the three ad types. However, this would have made it difficult to compare the effects of different ad types across the entire respondent pool.

In spite of these limitations, some interesting observations can be made based on this study. All three research questions were valid for both the voters and the candidates. With 215 votes from the voters group and 77 votes from the candidates group, the ads attacking the candidates' positions received more votes than either of the other two types. With 142 votes from the voters group and 42 votes from the candidates group, the ads attacking the candidates' past performance record garnered fewer votes than the position ads, but more than the personal ads. The ads attacking the candidates on a personal level received 77 votes from the voters group and 25 votes from the candidates group.

For the voters, voting intention by ad type was cross tabulated with sex, age, education, and partisanship. For the candidates, voting intention by ad type was cross tabulated with sex, level of incumbency, and partisanship. Since none of these demographic variables were significant for either group of respondents on any ad type, the relationship between the nature of the ad and voting intention was valid: Voting intention appears to be based on ad type, rather than on an extraneous factor such as the issue discussed in the ad.

Applying the Relationship Model

The findings support the existence of the relationships proposed in the variables relationship model (see Figure 1). Though there was some ambiguity in the wording of the attitudinal measure that could account for the inconclusive results, the behavioral involvement measure was valid. There were no findings that suggested anything other than a contingent relationship between political involvement and the other variables.

Voting intention was used to measure the effectiveness of the nature of the ad. Since generating votes is the ultimate aim of any political ad, the ad whose candidate received the most votes would be the most effective type. As the research proposals predicted, both the voters and the candidates voted mainly for the candidates in the position ads, followed by the performance and the personal ads. The position ads were the most effective, the performance were less effective, and the personal ads were the least effective.

Both the bivariate and the multivariate analyses proved the relationship between candidate trustworthiness and voting intention. In the two-way analyses for all three ad types, most of the high voting intention respondents gave the candidates high trustworthiness scores. This majority was higher for the position ads than for the personal ads, which would be expected since most of the personal ad respondents were in the low voting intention category for that ad type. That the majority of respondents rated the performance ad candidates as only moderately trustworthy, and that performance ad candidates received fewer votes than position ad candidates, also supports the existence of a relationship between candidate trustworthiness and voting intention.

These trends were repeated for the politically active respondents in the three-way analyses. The majority of respondents who voted for the candidates in both the position and personal ads gave those candidates high trustworthiness ratings. Again, this majority was higher for the position ad candidates than for the personal ad candidates; most of the personal ad respondents were in the low voting intention category. The majority of politically active, high voting intention respondents for the performance ads gave the candidates moderate trustworthy ratings. For the same reasons as in the two-way analysis, these findings support the existence of a relationship between candidate trustworthiness and voting intention.

In general, the results show that the nature of the ad influences candidate trustworthiness which, in turn, influences voting intention. The lack of a significant relationship between voting intention and candidate trustworthiness for less politically involved respondents would suggest that something other than trustworthiness influences their voting decisions.

Applying the Coorientation Model

The fact that both the voters and candidates generated the same order for the efficacy of ad types -- position, performance, personal -- indicates that there is mutual understanding between the groups regarding the different types of ads. It is important to remember that the candidates were asked for their views of the voters' perceptions of the candidates in the ads. While results from the voters' survey proved that trustworthiness was vital in obtaining votes, especially for a politically active public, neither of the candidates' trustworthiness measures were statistically significant. The candidates did not recognize the relationship between trustworthiness and voting intention. These findings suggest that there is consensus regarding the efficacy of different types of ads, but false consensus regarding the dynamics of that efficacy. Until candidates understand why position ads are more effective than performance ads, and personal ads are the least effective of all, they will not realize how detrimental some ads are to the "bonds of trust" Fenno described as the backbone of the candidate/voter relationship. Stopping or reducing the use of personal attack ads would benefit the candidate by positively increasing voting intentions, and would benefit society by helping to restore the candidate/voter relationship.

Avenues For Future Study

The current dissymmetry in that relationship suggests several possible avenues for future study. The first, obviously, is to repeat this study with the general public and a wider range of local and/or state politicians, to determine if the same effects exist outside the confines of the Texas Capitol. It would also be useful to conduct similar coorientation studies in states in different areas of the country, to identify possible regional effects that might influence the importance of trustworthiness in the candidate/voter relationship.

To reform the existing political communication system, however, the threat posed by some types of attack ads must be proved on a national level. Congresspeople and their constituencies could be surveyed to determine if the same dissymmetry exists in their understanding of their relationship. Political consultants would also have to be convinced that some types of ads actually cost their candidates votes. Perhaps a similar coorientation study, showing the discrepancy between what they believe motivates voting intention and what truly motivates voting intention, would be effective.

Whatever the level of government, decreasing the acceptance of negative campaign advertising is the key to rebuilding the trust between politicians and the public, and reversing the alienation of the American voter.

TABLE 1. Frequency of Voting Intention Per Ad Type

The Voters Group

NATURE OF THE AD	NUMBER OF VOTES	
	Position	215
	Performance	142
	Person	77

The Candidates Group

NATURE OF THE AD	NUMBER OF VOTES	
	Position	77
	Performance	42
	Person	25

TABLE 2. Voting Intention for Position by General Trustworthiness Ranking

VOTING INTENTION		GENERAL TRUSTWORTHINESS RANKING	
		Low	High
	Low	63.2%	27.9%
	High	36.8%	72.1%
	N = 142		
	X^2 = 14.80, 1 df, p<.001.		

TABLE 3. Voting Intention for Performance by Trustworthiness Index

VOTING INTENTION		TRUSTWORTHINESS INDEX		
		Low	Moderate	High
	Low	20.5%	21.7%	31.4%
	Moderate	63.6%	37.0%	52.9%
	High	15.9%	41.3%	15.7%
	N = 141			
	X^2 = 12.95, 4 df, p<.05.			

TABLE 4. Voting Intention for Personal Ads By General Trustworthiness Ranking

VOTING INTENTION		GENERAL TRUSTWORTHINESS RANKING	
		Low	High
	Low	71.6%	46.7%
	High	28.4%	53.3%
	N = 141		
	X^2 = 9.01, 1 df, p<.01.		

TABLE 5. **Voting Intention for Position by Trustworthiness Index Controlling for Political Involvement Behavior (PIB)**

High PIB

		TRUSTWORTHINESS INDEX		
		Low	Moderate	High
VOTING INTENTION	Low	18.8%	34.6%	59.4%
	High	81.3%	65.4%	40.6%
	N = 90			
	$X^2 = 11.40$, 2 df, $p<.01$.			

Low PIB

		TRUSTWORTHINESS INDEX		
		Low	Moderate	High
VOTING INTENTION	Low	35.3%	56.3%	27.8%
	High	64.7%	43.8%	72.2%
	N = 51			
	$X^2 = 3.05$, 2 df, n.s.			

TABLE 6. Voting Intention for Position by General Trustworthiness Ranking Controlling for PIB

High PIB

		GENERAL TRUSTWORTHINESS RANKING	
		Low	**High**
VOTING INTENTION	**Low**	66.7%	25.8%
	High	33.3%	74.2%
	N = 90		
	X^2 = 12.68, 1 df, $p<.001$.		

Low PIB

		GENERAL TRUSTWORTHINESS RANKING	
		Low	**High**
VOTING INTENTION	**Low**	57.1%	30.6%
	High	42.9%	69.4%
	N = 50		
	X^2 = 3.02, 1 df, n.s.		

TABLE 7. Voting Intention for Performance by Trustworthiness Index Controlling for PIB

High PIB

		TRUSTWORTHINESS INDEX		
		Low	Moderate	High
VOTING INTENTION	Low	20.0%	19.4%	41.4%
	Moderate	66.7%	41.9%	48.3%
	High	13.3%	38.7%	10.3%
	N = 90			
	$X^2 = 12.40$, 4 df, $p<.05$.			

Low PIB

		TRUSTWORTHINESS INDEX		
		Low	Moderate	High
VOTING INTENTION	Low	23.1%	28.6%	18.2%
	Moderate	53.8%	28.6%	59.1%
	High	23.1%	42.9%	22.7%
	N = 49			
	$X^2 = 3.53$, 4 df, n.s.			

TABLE 8. Voting Intention for Personal by General Trustworthiness Ranking Controlling for PIB

High PIB

	GENERAL TRUSTWORTHINESS RANKING		
		Low	**High**
VOTING INTENTION	**Low**	70.5%	44.4%
	High	29.5%	55.6%
	N = 89		
	$X^2 = 6.15$, 1 df, $p<.05$.		

Low PIB

	GENERAL TRUSTWORTHINESS RANKING		
		Low	**High**
VOTING INTENTION	**Low**	72.2%	50.0%
	High	27.8%	50.0%
	N = 50		
	$X^2 = 2.21$, 1 df, n.s.		

APPENDIX A

Breakdown of Significance by Variable

Bivariate Relationships

	TRUSTWORTHINESS SCALE	GENERAL TRUSTWORTHINESS RANKING
POSITION		X
PERFORMANCE	X	
PERSON		X

Multivariate Relationships: High PIB[*]

	TRUSTWORTHINESS SCALE	GENERAL TRUSTWORTHINESS RANKING
POSITION	X	X
PERFORMANCE	X	
PERSON		X

[*] All of the multivariate relationships were insignificant at low levels of PIB.

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Does The Audience Learn More About Images Than Issues From Televised Debates? Effects Of The First 1992 Presidential Debate

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Top Faculty Paper

Prepared for Presentation at the 1993 Annual Convention of
Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication
Radio and Television Journalism Division
August 1993
Kansas City, Missouri

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ABSTRACT

This paper reviews all previous studies of debate effects on issue learning and image formation, and reports the results of a new study of the effects of the first presidential debate in the 1992 election. The study used a between-subjects design with repeated measures. The study was replicated under both experimental and natural viewing conditions. Results show that the viewers learned a great deal about candidates' issue positions that were discussed in the debate, but no learning took place of issues that were not debated. The debate did not affect the viewers' perception of the two well-known candidates' personalities, but improved the perception of the less well-known candidate, Ross Perot, on several debate-related personality traits.

Does the audience of televised presidential debates learn more about candidates' personal characteristics than their issue positions? The answer to this question has important implications for the political process. According to the classic theory of democracy, a televised debate contributes positively to the democratic process when it increases the electorate's rational decision-making by informing them about issues and where the candidates stand on them. On the other hand, the debate makes a negative contribution to the extent that it leads to greater learning about candidates' personalities than it does about their stands on issues.

This latter function of debates has been criticized since 1960 when presidential debates were first televised. Based on his observation of the 1960 debates between Kennedy and Nixon, Lubell (1962) believed that many voters could not process the complicated issues discussed in the debates, so they "settled back and judged the debates as a personality contest" (p. 153). He concluded that televised debates, a novel format at the time, threatened the established political process because "the debates tend to lessen somewhat the importance of issues and party and to elevate the significance of personality, particularly on its theatrical side" (p. 152). This view has been echoed by other critics of debates (e.g., Lanoue and Schrott, 1991).

The current study aims to assess the impact of watching the first 1992 presidential debate on the audience's learning of candidates' issue positions and personality traits.[1] The study is based on a before-after experimental design involving viewing under both a controlled setting and a natural setting. The methods and findings of the study will be reported in detail after the literature review section below.

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[1] Later in this paper, we also use "image" as an interchangeable term with personality. A broader definition of image may include perception of candidate's characteristic leaning on

LITERATURE REVIEW

To determine how much the criticism of televised debates cited above is supported by empirical research, we have conducted a comprehensive, and quantitative review of the debate literature. Among all the published studies of presidential debates we could locate, 35 appear to be relevant according to our selection criteria:[2] (1) using exposure to the debate as an independent variable and (2) treating issue learning and image formation as dependent variables. A number of studies, although containing measures of issue learning and/or image formation, were excluded from this review because they either used issue/image as independent variables, or did not include debate viewing as an independent variable. Table 1 summarizes the major features of these studies (the bibliographical list is reported in Appendix A).

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issues (e.g., liberal vs. conservative). We have treated issues and image separately, because the paper addresses one of the criticisms of the role of televised debates in the political process. In addition, there is some empirical evidence (e.g., Miller, Wattenberg, and Malanchuk, 1984) that the public does draw a line between issues and images when asked to evaluate presidential candidates in open-ended question format.

[2] A reviewer of an earlier version of this paper pointed out that our review missed some relevant studies, which is likely to be the case. However, no specific citation has been given to us.

Table 1 about here

Overall Trends in Debate Research

Column 1 of Table 1 reveals several overall trends in debate effects research. The data show clearly that most of what is now known about debate effects came from studies of the first televised presidential debates in the 1960 election, and from the debates in the 1976 election. The latter election inspired the most debate effects studies, with 19 studies. Each of the three elections in the 1980s inspired only 4 or fewer studies. The increasing importance of the media, particularly television, in election campaigns calls for continued study of media effects. The new study, reported below, was designed to determine if effects found in earlier studies replicate under current conditions and to contribute further understanding of the role of debates in elections.

Most of the studies reviewed were drawn from either geographically local adult (16 studies) or college student populations (13). Only four studies were based on national general public samples. Two studies used selected respondents, such as members of the League of Women Voters (Nimmo et al., 1980), or females living in married-student houses (Tannenbaum et al., 1962). The sample size was generally small or medium, with the median being about 200. A quarter of the studies had 400 or more subjects or respondents, and a similar proportion had 100 or fewer.

An overwhelming majority (31) of the studies focused on the debates during the general election campaign. Only four dealt with primary debates. This concentration on general debates was somewhat compensated by the fact that most studies (28) examined the first debate in a campaign, which has been found to have greater impact than the subsequent debates (e.g., L. Becker et al., 1980).

Methodologically, many studies share several common features. Most studies (26) used surveys to collect data, and only six were based on experimental designs in which exposure was controlled or manipulated. Only 3 of these (Hawkins, et al. 1979; Lemert et al., 1983; Pfau, 1987) used a randon procedure to assign subjects to groups. Three studies (Bothwell and Brigham, 1983; Lang and Lang, 1979, 1980) combined both survey and experimental design features. From a research standpoint, televised debates have one advantage over other campaign formats (e.g., news coverage and political advertising): debates are always a distinct event with an easily defined beginning and end, whereas news stories and campaign commercials are continuously unfolding throughout the entire campaign. Most of the debate studies (30) apparently took advantage of this by using a before-after design. Still there were five studies using an after-only design, in which cases the impact of a debate would be confounded by the audience's prior knowledge or attitudes.

Confounding problems may also exist among the 30 studies with a before-after design. About one third of them (9) did not measure whether the audience actually watched a debate. By comparing issue/image scores measured before and after a debate, some studies basically assumed that the debate was the single source of the change, or lack of it.[3] Such an inference is especially problematic when the two points of measurement were one week or more apart (e.g., L. Becker et al. 1979; Hagner and Rieselbach, 1980).

An equally critical problem of confounding effects is that three-quarters (23) of the before-after studies did not include a control group (i.e., nonviewers of a debate). Most of these studies administered a pre-test a few days in advance (to offset any sensitization effect), and a post-test right after the debate (to eliminate post-debate influences). However, the audience might still be influenced by other sources of campaign information between the pre- and post-tests. This "contaminated learning" effect can be controlled by comparing change scores between viewers and nonviewers. Only seven studies did so, however.[4]

Another general weakness of the studies under review is the failure to link the audience's responses to actual debate content. Like other communication events, some debates can be linked to specific messages presented in the debate while others may not have any specific debate message references. In general, content-specific effects should be given more weight, because they are more interpretable and less subject to confounding influences. In addition, references to specific messages in a debate can be found readily, either by reading a transcript or reviewing visual tape. Unfortunately, only 7 out of the 35 studies took advantage of this. Without considering the original debate content, the remaining studies used a variety of other measures, which are more subjective (to be discussed below), to assess debate effects.

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[3] A study by Hagner and Rieselbach (1980) measured exposure, but did not use it to test the impact of debate for some unknown reason. Instead, they inferred the debate effects by comparing change scores between September and November.

[4] Bothwell and Brigham (1983) had a group of nonviewers in their sample, but excluded it from the analysis of debate effects. We have considered this as a study without a control group.

Variants of Issue/Image Measures

Even though we used a fairly narrow definition of debate effects to select the 35 studies, there were still diverse measures of issue learning and image formation in these studies. We have identified at least 7 variants of issue learning, 4 variants of image formation, and 4 variants of other attitudinal effects. The variants of issue learning include issue knowledge (i.e., the audience's judgment of a candidate's issue position, the accuracy of which can be verified with actual debate content); issue opinion (a subjective measure of the audience's own views on an issue); issue congruency (the similarity between the audience's own position on an issue and a candidate's position on the issue as perceived by the audience); issue discrimination (the difference between the perceived positions take by two or more candidates); audience's issue salience (the audience's own perception of the importance of an issue, which is a standard agenda-setting question), candidate's issue salience (the audience's perceived issue importance to a candidate), and issue-salience congruency (the distance between the audience's own issue salience and his/her perceived candidate issue-salience).

The variants of image formation are image perception (the audience's rating of a candidate on certain personality traits), image congruency (the difference between the perceived image of a candidate and the perceived ideal president), image discrimination (the difference in the perceived traits of two or more candidates), and image salience (the audience's perceived importance of certain traits of a candidate to his/her vote decision). In addition, many of the studies also measured other attitudinal effects of watching a debate, such as affective response toward a candidate, candidate choice, intention to vote, and interest in the campaign.

It turned out that 21 studies had at least one issue measure and 27 had at least one image measure. Two studies (Lang and Lang, 1979; McLeod et al., 1979) measured three or more variants of issue learning, and another two studies (Miller and MacKuen, 1979; Tannenbaum et al. 1962) had three image measures. Overall, four measures stood out as the most frequently used: image perception (by 23 studies), issue discrimination (9), issue knowledge (8), and image discrimination (6). Two of these measures, issue discrimination and image discrimination, deserve further consideration, because we believe that they were inappropriately used in studies of presidential debates.

The theory behind the two discrimination measures is that an informed citizenry rests on "cognitive discrimination ability" to distinguish two candidates' positions or personalities (Choi and Becker, 1987; Clarke and Kline, 1974), and that a televised debate is effective if it helps polarize two candidates in the audience's mind (Miller and MacKuen, 1979). When applying the theory to presidential debates, these studies implicitly made two strong assumptions: First, that the two competing candidates indeed have clear-cut differences in issue positions. Second, that the audience's perception of two candidates' personalities is a "zero-sum" process in which the rise of one's image is always at the price of the competing candidate. Both assumptions are questionable in light of empirical evidence.

In media-dominated modern politics, viable presidential candidates have to be middle-of-the-road to appeal to a large base of constituents. Consequently, the major candidates tend to share some similar centrist positions. As will be described in detail later, we found in the 1992 election that the three major candidates had similar stands on a number of issues. For example, they all favored retraining defense industry workers and opposed sending troops to Bosnia. It is possible that an audience guesses where a candidate stands on some issues based on general assumptions about such matters as the candidate's party affiliation or past record. Such guesses might lead to the belief that the candidates are farther apart than they really are. This would show up in a pre-debate study as large (but false) issue discrimination. After the debate in which candidates discuss the issue, the similarity of their position becomes better known, and the post-debate measures accurately show a decrease in issue-discrimination. Positing issue discrimination as a theoretical debate objective would lead to the conclusion that the debate failed to educate, when it in fact did.

In addition, there also has been ample evidence from the debate literature that all candidates usually improve their images among the audience in the same debate (e.g., Simons and Leibowitz, 1979). Based on such findings, Lanoue and Schrott (1991, p. 120) concluded that the audience formed images of each candidate in a non-zero sum manner. For this reason, too, a televised debate could lead to convergent, rather than polarized, images of candidates, which again would be considered a non- or failed-effect within the discrimination ability theory framework.

Debate Impact on Issue Knowledge and Image Perception

Because of these problems, we decided to focus on issue knowledge and image perception, as will be described in detail later. Both are direct measures of debate effects. The accuracy of issue knowledge also can be objectively verified by reference to debate content. Therefore, they have higher validity than the discrimination measures. Our analysis of previous studies shows that issue knowledge has been used in only 8 of the 35 studies, compared to 23 which measured image perception. Columns 2 and 3 in Table 1 display a comparison of these studies.

A few common features emerge from both issue knowledge studies and image perception studies: Both were more likely to use local adult and student samples, and were also more likely to focus on the first debate in the general election. These similarities were outnumbered by the differences between the two, however. One difference lies in an overall trend. While image perception studies were done in most elections, recent studies (1980 and thereafter) were more likely to include issue knowledge. This is in line with the general trend in mass communication research toward paying more attention to cognitive effects (Severin and Tankard, 1992).

The two types of studies appear to be quite different on several methodological dimensions. For example, the studies of issue knowledge were more balanced between survey and experiment (4 vs. 4) than the studies of image perception (20 vs. 3 in favor of survey). Exposure was measured in all studies of issue knowledge, but only in 14 out of 23 studies of image perception. Half of the issue knowledge studies included a control group (i.e., nonviewers), while the control group was used by only a quarter of image perception studies. Three studies of issue knowledge compared the audience's responses to actual debate content, but none of image perception studies attempted to do so (of course, image-related content is more difficult to trace). The only strength that image perception studies have over issue knowledge studies is that the former are more likely to use before-after design than the latter. Overall, then, the studies of issue knowledge appear, though fewer, to be based on firmer methodological ground than the studies of image perception. With these methodological differences in mind, let us take a look at the relative effects televised debates have had on issue knowledge and image perception.

Because of the diverse measurements and analyses used in these studies, we developed a classification scheme to categorize the debate effects found. The effects are considered "substantial/clear" if exposure to a debate (or its surrogate such as time) produces statistically significant, and consistent (in the case of multiple analyses), effects on issue knowledge or image perception. The effects are coded "none" if exposure is consistently nonsignificant. Many studies turned out to lie in between, and are labelled "moderate" in effect size, "mixed" across analyses, or "maybe" if the original author(s) only provided speculative descriptions. According to this classification, 3 of the 8 issue knowledge studies found televised debates to have substantial/clear effects, and 4 other knowledge studies found moderate/mixed effects. On the other hand, substantial effects were found in 5 out of 23 image perception studies, and moderate/mixed effects were found in another 10 image studies.

Note that not all these studies examined debate effects on issue knowledge and image perception simultaneously. In fact, only 5 studies included measures of both issue knowledge and image perception. Of them, three (L. Becker et al., 1980; Drew and Weaver, 1991; McLeod et al. 1979) reported that the impact of exposure to a debate was greater on issue knowledge than on image perception. One study (Lang and Lang, 1979) found the debate impact between issue knowledge and image perception to be similar. In only one study (Carter, 1962), a debate was found to produce a greater impact on image perception than on issue knowledge.

Summary

Several generalizations have emerged from this quantitative review of the debate effects research literature: First, the direct evidence is quite limited about the relative impact of televised debates on issue learning versus image formation, because most of the studies either have used inappropriate measures of the two effects, or have not compared the two simultaneously. The five studies that did conduct direct comparisons suggest that issue knowledge learning is greater than image perception formation. The findings are inconclusive, however, given the small number of studies and the methodological weaknesses mentioned above.

Based on almost the same literature reviewed here, Lanoue and Schrott (1991, p. 96) concluded that "In reality, though, viewers are far more likely to use debates to gain insight into each candidate's personality and character. ... a superior 'personal' presentation appears to be more important to voters than accumulation of issue-oriented debating 'points'." Our analysis suggests that this generalization is at best only very weakly supported by the existing data, if at all.

This literature review also suggests several ways to improve studies of debate effects. Specifically, there appear to be four criteria for a minimally necessary and sufficient test of debate effects on issue knowledge and image perception: (1) the basic design should be a between-subjects design contrasting viewers and nonviewers, (2) the dependent variables should be measured both pre- and post-debate, (3) the results should be verified with content analysis of the debate to ascertain content-specific effects, and (4) the data should be collected from both the forced viewing condition (experiment, to assure that exposure does take place) and the natural viewing condition (survey, to offset laboratory artifacts). Some of these issues have been noted by Joslyn (1984) and Lanoue and Schrott (1991) as well. The study reported below was designed based on these requirements.

METHOD

Subjects

The context of this study was the first 1992 presidential debate between George Bush, Bill Clinton, and Ross Perot, which took place on October 11, 1992. The subjects are 185 undergraduate students enrolled in introductory courses in communication and public speaking at a state university in Connecticut.[5] The students received class credits for participation in the experiment. Slightly more than half of the subjects (58%) were female. Roughly one third were freshmen, one third sophomores and the remaining juniors or seniors. About half of them had either a part-time or full-time job.

As in many other experimental studies using student subjects, our student sample does not represent the general population. For example, the level of political interest among the students is lower than that of the general population. Of our sample, 32% described themselves as "very interested" in national politics, as compared with 49% of a national sample of general electorate conducted in the same period.[6] However, our student sample is comparable to the general electorate in several other important aspects such as vote registration and intention. For example, 77% of the students said that they had registered to vote in the election, and 83% of these intended to vote, as compared to about 80% of the general population being "likely voters," defined somewhat differently by various national pollsters in early October, 1992.[7] The proportion of Democrats, Republicans, or Independents among the students is similar to the pattern among the general public in Connecticut.[8]

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[5] Another 23 participating in the pre-test but did not come back for the post-test. They are excluded from this study.

In addition, the students' knowledge about candidates' issue positions, one of the key variables under study, was similar to the national level. Before the debate, the students answered correctly, on the average, 29% of 21 knowledge questions about the three candidates' issue positions. This knowledge score was very close to the 32% correct rate of all knowledge questions, or 27% of "non-trivial" questions, reported by Justin Lewis and Michael Morgan (1992) based on their nationwide sample interviewed in the same period.

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[6] The latter survey was conducted by the Los Angeles Times from October 2 to 5, 1992 (achieved at the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research of the University of Connecticut). The difference may be reduced if the comparison was made between our sample and the younger voters of the national sample, though.

[7] For example, Gallup found 79% of those surveyed between October 1 and 3, 1992 were registered voters. The findings are achieved at the Roper Center.

[8] See a survey conducted by Hartford Courant and Institute for Social Inquiry of University of Connecticut between August 27 and September 2, 1992, which is achieved at the Roper Center.

Procedure

During the recruitment, the study was described as an "election" study. The debate was not specifically referred to in any way. The students were asked to participate in two sessions, three to five days apart. The first session (pre-test) was held between October 7 and 9, two to four days prior to the debate . The subjects came at a time of their choice to answer the pre-test questionnaire (to be described in the measurement section), which lasted about 20 minutes.

The post-test took place either on Sunday evening, October 11 when the debate aired, or throughout the following day. According to their appointment made before the pre-test, 53 students came to the post-test on October 11. The first time students became aware that the presidential debate was involved in the study was upon arrival for the second session when they were asked to watch the 90-minute long telecast. Right after the debate, they answered the post-test questionnaire, which was identical to the pre-test. This group of 53 will be called "experimental viewers."

When the remaining 132 subjects arrived next day, we first asked them a series of filter questions to determine whether they had watched the debate on TV, listened to it on radio at their own initiation, or had watched, heard or read any news reports about the debate. Roughly half of them (65) had watched or listened to the debate,[9] while the other half (67) had neither watched nor been exposed to news about the debate. We randomly assigned, in a ratio of 2 to 1, the uncontaminated subjects into a newspaper group (46) and a control group (21). The newspaper group was asked to read the full transcript of the debate printed in The New York Times of the day, while the control group was not. Both groups then completed the post-test questionnaire. The newspaper group was included for another purpose unrelated to the current study, and will be excluded from the analysis reported below. The basic analysis will compare the experimental group with the "uncontaminated" control group. For convenience, we will call the members of the control group "nonviewers."

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[9] In fact, only one subject listened to the debate on radio, while the other 64 watched it on TV. For convenience, we will not distinguish the listener from the rest.

The "contaminated" subjects who had watched the debate on the previous evening at their homes or dormitories also answered the post-test questionnaire. They will be labeled "natural viewers." In the filter-questions, we asked them to indicate which of six 15-minute segments of the debate they watched, and which other activities they engaged in while watching, from which we derived a measure of attention to the debate. These questions were later combined to form an exposure measure. The experimental subjects and the natural subjects were analyzed separately. Thus the analysis of natural viewers provides an independent check on the effects of experimental manipulation.

It should be noted that the assignment to the initial experimental exposure condition was not strictly random. At the beginning of the study, each subject was asked to choose a time for both pre- and post-tests. While the selection of the pre-test sessions did not affect the outcome at all, the choice of October 11 for the post-test session determined placement in the experimental viewing condition, while the choice of October 12 placed them in either the newspaper, control, or natural viewing conditions. Of course, no subject was aware of this because the sign-up occurred long before they even came to the pre-test, and in addition, the subjects had no way of knowing that the debate was involved at all. Therefore, such assignment can be called a "blind self-selection" procedure, as opposed to the "conscious self-selection" procedure used in almost all previous experimental studies in which the subjects were told that a debate was being studied and allowed to choose a session to attend.

However, there was still a possibility of systematic selection biases. To detect these, we compared various pre-test items between experimental viewers, nonviewers and natural viewers. Since the pre-test was taken prior to exposure to the stimulus (i.e., the debate), significant difference in the pre-test scores among these groups would indicate a biased assignment. Otherwise, we could reasonably assume no systematic bias involved in the assignment, and any significant difference detected in the post-test could be attributed to the stimulus.

Table 2 about here

As shown in Table 2, except for political interest, we did not find any significant difference among the three groups, or between any pair of them, in every important characteristics in the pre-test. The subject's sex, class standing, party affiliation, election participation, and media use habits were similar across groups. The groups differed on political interest, however, with the natural viewers being most interested in national politics, which explains at least in part why they voluntarily watched the debate. Therefore, political interest was controlled in the final analysis. In addition, since there was the possibility of contingent effects, other variables, such gender, employment, and party affiliation, were also introduced into the final analysis as control variables.

Equally similar were their scores on the key dependent variables (to be described later): knowledge of candidates' issue positions, perception of candidates' characteristics, and vote preference. The only exception among the 21 comparison is the perception of Perot's communication style, in which the natural viewers scored significantly higher than the other two groups. This did not affect the final results because we only compared experimental viewers with nonviewers, or heavy natural viewers with light natural viewers.

Measures

As mentioned above, pre- and post-test questionnaires contained a set of identical questions, which could be divided into four sections: (1) perception of candidates' characteristics; (2) knowledge of candidates' issue positions, (3) rating of the salience of election issues and the candidates' performance on these issues, and (4) the subject's personal background information. Because section 3 will not be used for the current study, and section 4 is self explanatory, we will describe below only the first two sections.

Issue knowledge. To test the effects of all specific messages presented in the debate on the subject's knowledge, we would have had to know in advance exactly what issues would come up in the debate, which was of course impossible. After consulting various election news reports, we complied a list of 24 "most-likely-to-be-debated" items for both pre- and post-tests. These items asked the subject to indicate whether a candidate supported, opposed, or had no position on 24 specific policy issues. The same 24 items were asked for Bush, Clinton, and Perot, respectively. Therefore, the total number of issue knowledge items is 72 (24 items by 3 candidates).

For obvious reasons, we did not anticipate that all three candidates would discuss all these issues. On the contrary, it would increase the power of the study if a portion of the issues would not be addressed. It would enable examination of differences between the debated and undebated issues. Theoretically, learning should occur only of the debated issues, not of the undebated issues. If there was knowledge gain in the latter, we should suspect the presence of some confounding influences.

Our content analysis of the debate transcript shows that 21 out of the 72 items were explicitly debated: 8 were addressed by Bush, 9 by Clinton, and 4 by Perot. Although these items accounted for less than one third of the original list, there are sufficient numbers to form a composite knowledge score for each candidate. Specifically, based on actual statements made by the candidates in the debate, we gave each correct answer a score of "1," and summed them for each candidate respectively (the wording and the key for these knowledge items are in Appendix B). Because the total number of issue items varies from one candidate to another, we converted the scores into percentages, to make the knowledge score about each candidate's positions comparable.

Image perception. The research literature reports a wide variety of measures of presidential candidate images. We chose to follow a five-dimensional scheme developed by Miller and his associates (Miller, Wattenberg, and Malanchuk, 1984; Rusk and Weisberg, 1972). Our choice of this scheme was based on several considerations. First, its external validity has been tested by replications within many national probability samples. Second, its measures are derived from responses to open-ended questions. In other words, the assessment items are actually used by ordinary voters, rather than imposed by researchers (see Clarke and Kline, 1974, for a criticism of researcher-oriented measures). Third, the resulting cognitive structure of candidate assessments has been verified by eight National Election Studies over 32 years (1952-80). To quote Miller et al. (p. 208), "The empirical evidence ... provides consistent support for the theory that Americans evaluate presidential candidates on the basis of a limited set of general and enduring criteria. In short, people have a prototype of what a president should be like and they judge real candidates by these standards."

Miller et al. labeled the five dimensions as "competence," "integrity," "reliability," "charisma," and "personal." Competence refers to a candidate's past political experience, comprehension of political issues, and intelligence. Integrity includes remarks such as trustworthy, honest, and sincere. Reliability is a label that does not well represent the traits involved, such as strong, decisive, and aggressive. The authors distinguished reliability from integrity in this way (p. 197): "Reliability thus serves as a bridge between integrity and competence. Perhaps the best definition of it [i.e., reliability] would be as trust in [a] capability sense rather than in the honesty sense." We have adopted the term "potency" to replace "reliability" in this study. Charisma (called "leadership" in an earlier version, Miller and MacKuen, 1979) deals with a candidate's ability to get along with and communicate with people. Personal is a catch-all category that includes various observable features of a candidate's appearance, such as age, health, smile, and speech pattern. In our study, we decided to call the last dimension "communication style." Miller et al. (1984) report that although all of these dimensions involved in the way voters judge presidential candidates, competence accounts for the most variance, followed by integrity. Charisma seems to be the least important among the five dimensions.

In both pre- and post-test, we asked the subjects to rate each of the three candidates along 34 bipolar items, representing various specific personality traits. The evaluations were scored on 7-point scales with 7 being most positive and 1 most negative. The resulting scores were used to fit a five-dimension model. Since the model will repeat 6 times (=3 candidates x 2 points), not all of the 34 items fit all 6 models. Some items were salient only in the pre- or post-test. Others items were salient only for a particular candidate. Still other items loaded on almost all five dimensions across all candidates and all time points. Therefore, we selected 3 "best" items for each of the dimensions, or a total 15 items for each candidate at each point (see Appendix C for the wording of these items). This resulted in a quite satisfactory structure, in which each of the five image dimensions for each candidate at each point is made up by the same items, with a high internal consistency score (Cronbach's alpha) around .80 (Appendix C).

Analysis

Our research question is fairly straightforward: whether the debate has a greater impact on image perception than issue knowledge, or vice versa. This question can be answered by simply comparing the coefficients of the independent variable (i.e., exposure to the debate) regressed on the two dependent variables (knowledge scores and image scores). The coefficients can be obtained from either an ANOVA approach which uses the change score of knowledge and image from pre-test to post-test as the dependent variable, or an OLS regression approach which uses the post-test score as the dependent variable and the pre-test score as an covariate. We chose to follow the regression strategy because change score has limiting statistical properties

(Heilzer, 1959; Rogosa, Brandt and Zimowski, 1982). On the other hand, regression analysis with pre-test score as a covariate can precisely measure the impact of pre-test on post-test (i.e., autocorrelation), which is often the best explanation for the lack of debate effects.

For each candidate, 7 regression analyses were performed, each with one of the following post-test scores as the dependent variables: (1) knowledge of a candidate's position on the issues discussed by the candidate in the debate; (2) knowledge of the candidate's position on the issues he did not discuss in the debate; (3) perception of the candidate's competence, (4) potency, (5) integrity, (6) charisma, and (7) communication style.

Exposure to the debate was the independent variable in every regression analysis. Only one pre-test score (e.g., Perception of Bush's Competence at Time 1) was entered in the corresponding regression (using Perception of Bush's Competence at Time 2 as the dependent variable). Gender, Employment, Party Affiliation, and Political Interest were included as control variables in every regression equation.

The same seven OLS regressions were repeated for three candidates, and for both experimental sample and natural viewer sample. In total, 42 (=7 x 3 x 2) regressions were conducted. For simplicity, we will report in Table 3 only the two central coefficients for each regression: exposure and the autoregressor (i.e., pre-test score). Following a procedure used in meta-analysis, we will report in Table 4 the average coefficient for all five control variables (sex, employment, political interest, and Democrat and Republican partisanship).

FINDINGS

Table 3 displays unstandardized OLS regression coefficients, because we (1) are primarily interested in the significance and the magnitude of these two measures, rather than their relative importance as compared with other control variables, and (2) need to compare these two coefficients across 42 regressions. The unstandardized coefficients tells the percentage difference in issue knowledge, or the difference on a 7-point scale in image perception, between the viewers and the nonviewers. For example, the first entry in Table 3 (row 1 and column 1) is 33.996, which means that the experimental viewers, on the average, learned 34% more than the nonviewers about Bush's position on the issues discussed by him in the debate, other things being equal.

Likewise, the coefficient .400 of exposure on Perot's competence (row 9 of col. 3) indicates that the viewers rated Perot on that dimension .4 of a point on a 7-point scale higher than the nonviewers in the post-test, after controlling for anything else. On the other hand, the difference between the viewers and the nonviewers on Perot's charisma is much larger (about 1.5 points on a 7-point scale, see row 21, col. 3).

Table 3 about here

Learning Debated Issues

The evidence is unambiguously strong for the effect of watching the debate on learning the issue positions discussed by the candidates in the debate. As the top panel ("Debated Issues") in Table 3 shows, after controlling for gender, employment, political interest, and party affiliation (not shown here), those watching the debate under the experimental condition know, on the average, 34% more about Bush's issue position, 24% more about Clinton's, and 39% more about Perot's position, as compared with the nonviewers. The learning is quite impressive, if one considers their knowledge level prior to the debate. Recall from Table 2 that, before the debate, the experimental viewers correctly answered 22% of Bush's positions, 39% of Clinton's, and 11% of Perot's, all of which were not different from the nonviewers' prior knowledge level.

The same learning effects are detected among the natural viewers. An explanation is in order to help interpret the coefficients of exposure for the natural samples. As stated above, in the experimental sample, exposure is simply a dummy variable, coded 1 for the viewers and 0 for the nonviewers. Therefore, the coefficient indicates the average difference in learning between the viewers and the nonviewers, other things being equal. In the natural sample, however, exposure is an interval scale comprised from the number of 15-minute segments of the debate watched and the level of attention paid to the debate. To make the coefficients of exposure compatible with the experimental sample, we scaled the natural viewers' exposure to the range from 0 to 1, with 0 being minimal watching plus least attention, and 1 being maximum watching plus most attention.

Therefore, the coefficient of 38.572 in column 4 of first line indicates that the most attentive viewers learned 39% more about Bush's issue positions than the least attentive viewers under the natural viewing condition, other things being equal. Qualitatively, the difference between the most attentive viewers and the least attentive viewers in the natural sample is not exactly the same as the difference between the experimental viewers and the nonviewers. However, as the top panel ("Debated Issues") of Table 3 shows, the differences appear to be comparable at least quantitatively. The corroboration between the experimental data and the survey data seems to rule out an artifact effect from the experimental stimulus.

It is interesting to note that while prior knowledge strongly affects the learning of Bush's or Clinton's issue position, the autocorrelation is nonsignificant for Perot who was little known before going into the debate. The absence of autocorrelation explains why exposure to the debate has the strongest effect on learning Perot's issue stance, among both experimental and natural viewers. Conversely, exposure has the relatively weakest impact on both experimental and natural viewers' learning of Clinton's position.

The statement that the audience learned most about Perot's issue position but least about Clinton's position from the debate may obscure an important fact, however. The reason the viewers acquired the least issue knowledge about Clinton is simply that they had been most familiar with his positions prior to the debate (see Table 2). When considering both the baseline knowledge and the acquired knowledge, we can see an interesting pattern of convergence (Figure 1). For the viewers, despite quite different starting values, the debate "equalizes" the level of knowledge about all three candidates' issue positions. This pattern does not hold for the nonviewers who, as should be the case, knew more about Clinton's issue position than about the other two candidates both before and after the debate.

Figure 1 about here

Learning Undebated Issues

While the viewers, either under an experimental condition or a natural setting, learned a great deal of the candidates' positions on the issues debated, they ought to have learned little about the undebated issues. As the second panel ("Undebated Issues") of Table 3 shows, neither the experimental viewers nor the natural viewers significantly improved their knowledge of any of the candidates' positions on any issue not discussed in the debate. This finding offers an additional validity check for the effect of the debate on learning the debated issues described above. In other words, the impact of debate on issue learning is only content-specific. Television does not have the magic power to generalize the knowledge gain beyond what is said in the debate.

Image Perception

The effect of watching the debate on the students' perception of candidates' character is much more limited. As the last five panels of Table 3 show, the impact of watching the debate is largely confined to the perception of Perot's character among the experimental viewers. An exception is that the experimental viewers also have a more positive view of Bush's communication style than the nonviewers, other things being equal. No difference can be found in Bush's other four image dimensions. Nor is there any difference in any of Clinton's five image dimensions. For the natural viewer sample, exposure to the debate virtually does not have any impact on any image dimension for any candidate.

Nevertheless, the effect of watching the debate on Perot's image is substantial among the experimental sample. Other things being equal, the experimental viewers scored him about one to one and half points (on a 7-point scale) higher than the nonviewers for his integrity, charisma, and communication. However, there is no difference in perceptions of Perot's competence and potency, the two dimensions which may be more affected by a candidate's performance over a total career than his performance in a 90-minute debate (Miller et al., 1984).

Why did the debate fail to bring about any significant change to Bush's or Clinton's images? The answer can be found in the stability of image perception, as indicated by the high autocorrelation coefficients between pre- and post-test image scores which range from about .50 to .80 for Bush and Clinton, respectively. The strong high autocorrelation shows that the subjects had already formed fairly firm perceptions of the two well-known politicians, after having been exposed to the nearly year-long campaign. Consequently, there should be minimal room for change.

Control Variables

Table 4 about here

As explained in detail in Table 4, we used a standard meta-analysis procedure to summarize a massive number of control variable coefficients into a manageable table. This practice was based on two considerations. First, the effects (or lack of, for that matter) of these control variables are not theoretically relevant. They were included in the regressions to offset any systematic bias resulting from the nonrandom assignment mentioned earlier. More importantly, most of the control variables are in fact not significant, even before being summarized.

All three significant coefficients in Table 4 are related to issue knowledge. Knowledge of debated issues is affected by the student's employment status (those having a full- or part-time job knew more), and political interest (the higher the interest, the more the student knew). Political interest also has a positive effect on knowledge of undebated issues, as can be expected. In fact, political interest is the only significant predictor (on the top of the pre-test score) of undebated issues.

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

Summary of Previous Research

A central concern of previous researchers of effects of presidential debates on the electorate has been whether the debates contribute to learning about issues in the campaign and whether they increase the salience of candidates' personality in voter decision making. The literature review reported here has found that a variety of research designs, concepts and measures have been used to study the effects of presidential debates. The review also has found that image formation has received attention in more studies than has issue learning, but that the trend is toward more study of issue learning. Few studies have focused on both issues and images. Generally, the methods used in study of issues appear to be somewhat stronger than those used to study images.

Reviewing the variety of methods used, we have found that surveys have outnumbered experimental designs and that when experiments were used, they seldom have employed random assignment. Surveys have rarely employed national probability samples. Sample sizes tend to be small in both surveys and experiments. And most studies have used samples of students in both surveys and experiments. Most studies used a before-after design without a control group (i.e., "within-subjects design). A few studies even did not measure actual exposure to the debate studied. Results of these studies reflect the great variety of methods and approaches used. Nevertheless, most studies have found at least some effects of debate on issue learning, and more mixed effects on image formation.

Results In This Study

This study has found that the audience learned a great deal about the candidates' issue positions from the first presidential debate in 1992 election. The issue learning took place for all three candidates, with differential rates. The audience learned the most about the least known candidate, Perot, but learned the least about the most known candidate, Clinton. In the end, the debate equalized the level of issue knowledge across the three candidates. In addition, the issue learning occurred only to those issues discussed by the candidates in the debate. In other words, only message-specific effects have been found in this study. These patterns hold up in both the experimental and natural viewing conditions, and are consistent with expectations based on results of previous research.

The results pertaining to the effects of the first televised presidential debate on image formation were mixed, which also is consistent with previous studies. The audience's perceptions of the two well-known candidates, the Incumbent president Bush, and the Democrat Party candidate Clinton who had run an effective campaign for almost a year, were not affected by the debate. Exposure to the debate, however, did substantially change the viewers' minds about the least known and least popular candidate, Ross Perot, in the positive direction. Perot had entered the race late (July 1992), had campaigned, withdrawn from the race, and recentered just before the first debate. As late as in early October, 1992, public opinion polls showed that a sizable portion of the electorate still were unsure, or negative about him.[10]

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[10] For example, CBS News/New York Times poll between October 2 and 4, 1992 found that while 7% of the registered voters were favorable about Ross Porot, 59% were not favorable. Another 36% were either not sure or did not hear enough about Ross Perot. The poll results are achieved at the Roper Center of the University of Connecticut.

With these conditions providing the context, his performance in the debate could have been critical and our study results showed that the debate helped him improve his image considerably. However, of the five image dimensions we measured, the debate was more likely to affect the perception of three debate-related performance dimensions (i.e., integrity, charisma, and communication style), and two other dimensions which perhaps are better indicators of performance in office -- competence and potency.

At least two important generalizations might be drawn from these results: First, debates are least effective in changing the public's mind about the character of a presidential candidate if he is well known; they are most effective when candidates are not well known. This generalization is consistent with findings reported in Table 1 that show greater impact in primary debates (in which several candidates, at least some of whom are not well known, compete for public attention) than in general election debates (in which a smaller number of well-known candidates participate).

Second, when a candidate's image is changed by performance in a debate, the change occurs in dimensions of personality that are more evident in a debate format, and not in dimensions that are more relevant to performance in office. This generalization, if it holds up in future studies, could ease the concern of those who believe that a debate has potential to introduce irrational or non-rational considerations into a presidential campaign by shifting focus from issue considerations to personality considerations. It suggests that the public does not leap to conclusions about capabilities as president from proficiency as debater.

Note that these findings are based on a fairly rigorous research design. Contaminated learning from external sources has been controlled by contrasting the change scores between the viewers and the nonviewers. Experimental artifacts have been offset by replicating the same measures in an experimental sample and a natural viewer sample. Knowledge learning has been verified with content analysis of actual debate transcript. Measures of image perceptions were developed based on a well-established literature, and have proven to have high reliability in this study. Given these characteristics, we believe the findings reported above are substantial and reliable.

Based on our findings, we would like to draw several general comments on the implications of televised debates for the democratic process. First, debates appear to make positive contributions to rational vote decision-making by helping the audience learn substantial amounts about the candidates' issue stands. Note that the 1992 first presidential debate took place less than four weeks before the election. However, as shown by Lewis and Morgan (1992) and this study, the electorate had, on the average, only a 20% rate of accuracy about candidates' issue positions at that point in the campaign. Our study suggests that the first debate improved the accuracy rate over 50%.

On the other hand, there seems to be less convincing evidence suggesting the fear that televised debates may have a negative impact on the democratic process by focusing the audience's attention on the candidates' personalities and character. As found in this study, debates do not have much impact on the audience's perception of well-known candidates. This should ease much of the concern about the negative impact of debates, because the presidential candidates are usually well-known by the time a debate takes place. As this study shows, when a less well-known candidate, usually an independent candidate, surges in the campaign, debates can enhance the candidate's images.

Where this debate did influence the electorate's perception of a less well-known candidate, it was on traits that are relatively more related to debate performance, such as charisma and communication style, than on relatively job-related performance traits, such as competence and potency. However, as Miller et al. (1984) found, when it comes to the vote decision, the job-related performance dimension (i.e., competence) carries more weight than the debate-related dimensions.

A final caution about the limits of our study is in order here. We used a student sample, and measured only short-term effects (i.e., right after exposure to the debate). While our design improves various shortcomings in the previous studies, it is still not clear whether our findings hold up in the general electorate and in the long-term (e.g., a week or more after the debate).

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TABLE 1
STUDIES OF DEBATE EFFECTS ON ISSUE LEARNING AND IMAGE FORMATION

	Total Studies (N=35)	Issue Knowledge (N=8)	Image Perception (N=23)
Year of the Study			
1960	5	1	5
1976	19	4	12
1980-88	11	3	6
Data Collection			
Survey	26	4	20
Experiment	6	2	1
Exprmnt. & Survey	3	2	2
Study Design			
Before-After	30	5	20
After-Only	5	3	3
Exposure to Debate			
Measured	25	8	14
Unmeasured	10	0	9
Including Nonviewers			
Yes	10	4	5
No	25	4	18
Sample Characteristics			
National Adults	4	0	3
Local Adults	16	6	11
Selected Groups	2	0	2
Students	13	2	7
Sample Size			
Under 100	7	0	5
100-300	15	4	8
300+	13	4	10
Campaign Context			
Primary Season	4	1	1
General Season	31	7	22
Debate Sequence			
First Debate	28	7	20
Later Debate	7	1	3
Linking Debate Content			
Yes	5	2	0
No	30	6	0
Effects of Debate			
Substantial/Clear	na	3	5
Moderate/Mixed	na	4	10
None	na	1	8

Note: Four studies which examined the impact of debate on affective response or vote decision are included in the overall 35 studies, but excluded from the issue-knowledge group and the image-formation group.

TABLE 2
CHARACTERISTICS OF THREE GROUPS BEFORE THE DEBATE

	Exprmntal Viewers (N=53)	Non-Viewers (N=21)	Natural Viewers (N=65)
Female	54.7%	71.4%	50.8%
Employed	50.9	42.9	33.8
Class Standing			
Freshman	39.6	42.9	32.3
Jr. & Sr.	41.5	28.6	30.8
Media Reliance			
TV > Newspapers	43.4	28.6	35.4
TV < Newspapers	15.1	28.6	16.9
Election Particptn			
Registered to Vote	73.6	81.0	80.0
Intend to Vote	81.1	81.0	86.2
Political Interest*			
Very Much	30.2	23.8	40.6
Not At All	24.5	28.6	4.7
Party Affiliation			
Democrat	26.4	19.0	23.4
Republican	17.0	23.8	29.7
Independent#	56.6	57.1	46.9
TV = Newspapers	39.6	33.3	44.6
Pre-test Scores on Bush			
Debated Issues	22.10	21.76	25.27
Undebated Issues	25.10	21.61	30.41
Competence	4.88	4.96	5.37
Potency	5.11	4.95	5.38
Integrity	3.76	4.01	4.18
Charisma	4.53	4.90	4.94
Communication	4.12	4.03	4.35
Vote Choice	.16	.14	.32
Pre-test Scores on Clinton			
Debated Issues	39.38	41.07	42.69
Undebated Issues	29.08	26.98	31.92
Competence	5.22	4.96	5.14
Potency	5.23	5.31	5.27
Integrity	4.21	4.52	4.35
Charisma	5.66	5.92	5.93
Communication	5.03	5.06	4.95
Vote Choice	.50	.61	.41
Pre-test Scores on Perot			
Debated Issues	10.69	12.69	14.87
Undebated Issues	21.69	9.52	26.92
Competence	3.74	3.71	4.17
Potency	4.14	3.71	4.54
Integrity	3.31	2.84	3.66
Charisma	3.93	3.71	3.90
Communication*	3.15	2.98	3.81
Vote Choice	.01	.00	.00

* Difference between the natural viewers and the experimental viewers/nonviewers is significant at .05.

# "Independent" includes A Connecticut Party and People for Perot.

TABLE 3
UNSTANDARDIZED OLS REGRESSION COEFFICIENTS
(Standard Errors in Parentheses)

	Experimental Sample (N=74)			Natural Viewer Sample (N=65)		
	Bush	Clinton	Perot	Bush	Clinton	Perot
Debated Issues						
Exposure to Debate	33.996***	24.703***	38.900***	38.572***	16.522**	38.894**
	(4.697)	(4.090)	(6.288)	(7.188)	(5.947)	(11.904)
Pretest Score	.389**	.562***	.248	.391***	.526***	.026
	(.144)	(.096)	(.151)	(.106)	(.082)	(.168)
Undebated issues						
Exposure to Debate	1.937	2.672	8.677	-4.337	.558	16.147
	(2.782)	(2.722)	(6.661)	(5.812)	(5.819)	(12.019)
Pretest Score	.604***	.520***	.352**	.719***	.642***	.474***
	(.087)	(.109)	(.113)	(.098)	(.103)	(.130)
Competence						
Exposure to Debate	.169	-.045	.400	.399	.381	.301
	(.229)	(.180)	(.332)	(.392)	(.473)	(.537)
Pretest Score	.796***	.544***	.679***	.493***	.584***	.466***
	(.088)	(.079)	(.116)	(.127)	(.135)	(.131)
Potency						
Exposure to Debate	.333	.076	.396	-.287	-.085	.328
	(.265)	(.230)	(.333)	(.371)	(.382)	(.598)
Pretest Score	.623***	.532***	.373***	.524***	.559***	.441***
	(.091)	(.092)	(.090)	(.098)	(.092)	(.108)
Integrity						
Exposure to Debate	.328	-.072	1.175***	.233	.766	.329
	(.254)	(.289)	(.337)	(.385)	(.462)	(.459)
Pretest Score	.828***	.772***	.542***	.681***	.573***	.768***
	(.076)	(.089)	(.101)	(.082)	(.094)	(.115)
Charisma						
Exposure to Debate	.218	.246	1.498***	.379	.240	.655
	(.263)	(.257)	(.276)	(.441)	(.405)	(.519)
Pretest Score	.838***	.573***	.553***	.696***	.493***	.295*
	(.092)	(.110)	(.082)	(.096)	(.112)	(.123)
Communication						
Exposure to Debate	.561*	.387	.843**	-.092	.378	.430
	(.265)	(.263)	(.304)	(.439)	(.461)	(.584)
Pretest Score	.406***	.356***	.427***	.452***	.582***	.490***
	(.087)	(.103)	(.110)	(.106)	(.113)	(.116)

* p < .5; ** p < .01; *** p < .001.

Note: Exposure is a dummy variable for the experimental subjects with 1 being the viewer group and 0 being control group; for the natural subjects, it is an interval scale varying from 0 to 1 with 1 being maximum watching and attention and 0 being minimal watching and attention.

TABLE 4
WEIGHTED AVERAGE PARTIAL CORRELATION COEFFICIENTS BETWEEN CONTROL VARIABLES AND ISSUE/IMAGE SCORES

	ISSUES		IMAGES				
	Debated	Undebat.	Comptnce	Potency	Integrity	Charisma	Commnctn
Gender	-0.061	-0.061	0.095	0.003	-0.024	0.002	0.042
Employed	0.109*	0.013	-0.031	0.066	0.017	-0.013	0.067
Pol. Intrst	0.189*	0.242*	0.024	-0.009	-0.059	-0.049	0.015
Republican	-0.065	-0.018	0.025	0.068	0.007	0.012	0.056
Democrat	0.006	-0.037	-0.041	-0.003	0.030	0.025	-0.051

* $p < .05$.

Note: The base from which each entry was calculated consists of 6 partial correlation coefficients (3 candidates by 2 samples), which were obtained after controlling for the main predictors (exposure and pre-test score) and all other control variables. Before averaging, the coefficients were Fisher z-transformed (Hedges and Olkin, 1985). Sample size (74 for the experimental sample and 65 for the natural viewer sample) was used as the weighting criterion. The resultant average Fisher's z-values were retransformed back to partial correlation coefficients reported here. Significance test was based on confidence intervals at .905 level. Homogeneity test (Q test, Hedges and Olkin, 1985) was performed to assess the consistency of the original correlations. Among the 35 cases (5 control variables by 7 equations), 6 have a Q-value greater than 11.07 (d.f.=5), suggesting that the individual correlations do not meet the homogeneity assumption. These 6 cases are underlined in the table.

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A LIST OF DEBATE EFFECTS STUDIES

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APPENDIX B
WORDING OF ISSUE KNOWLEDGE ITEMS
(Numbered as original, correct answer in parentheses)

#3. Wants to lower taxes on the profits obtained from investment in new business ventures only. (Clinton: Yes.)

#7. Would require employers of 50 or more people to provide employees unpaid leave from their jobs when there are family emergencies or to care for new born children. (Bush: No; Clinton: Yes.)

#9. Backs a major government program to hire people to work on building and rebuilding roads, bridges and railbeds. (Clinton: Yes; Perot: Yes.)

#10. Would avoid sending troops to stop the violence between Serbs, Muslims and Bosnians and wants the violence stopped through diplomatic means. (Bush: Yes; Clinton: Yes; Perot: Yes.)

#11. Wants legislation to reduce the number of civil (not criminal) lawsuits. (Bush: Yes).

#15. Wants to increase taxes on "wealthier" Americans. (Bush: No; Clinton: Yes.)

#16. Supports full and active participation of Afro-Americans in American social and economic life. (Bush: Yes; Clinton: Yes; Perot: Yes.)

#18. Has presented a plan that would eliminate the national debt completely in 5 years. (Clinton: No.)

#19. Advocates a government program to retrain workers who have become unemployed. (Bush: Yes; Clinton: Yes.)

#20. Would increase government spending to treat AIDS patients and to find a cure for AIDS. (Bush: No; Clinton: Yes.)

#24. Would increase the tax on gasoline 10 cents a gallon each year for the next five years. (Bush: No; Perot: Yes.)

APPENDIX C
WORDING OF IMAGE PERCEPTION ITEMS
(Numbered as original, Cronbach's Alpha in parentheses)

Competence:
#1. Intelligent ... Not intelligent
#2. Competent ... Incompetent
#4. He knows a lot ... He doesn't know much
(The Cronbach's Alpha of the three items for Bush is .76 at time 1 and .83 at time 2; for Clinton is .75 at time 1 and .75 at time 2; for Perot is .76 at time 1 and .90 at time 2.)

Potency:
#21. Aggressive .. Passive
#22. Strong ... Weak
#24. Dominant ... Subservient
(The Cronbach's Alpha of the three items for Bush is .80 at time 1 and .85 at time 2; for Clinton is .75 at time 1 and .77 at time 2; for Perot is .81 at time 1 and .85 at time 2.)

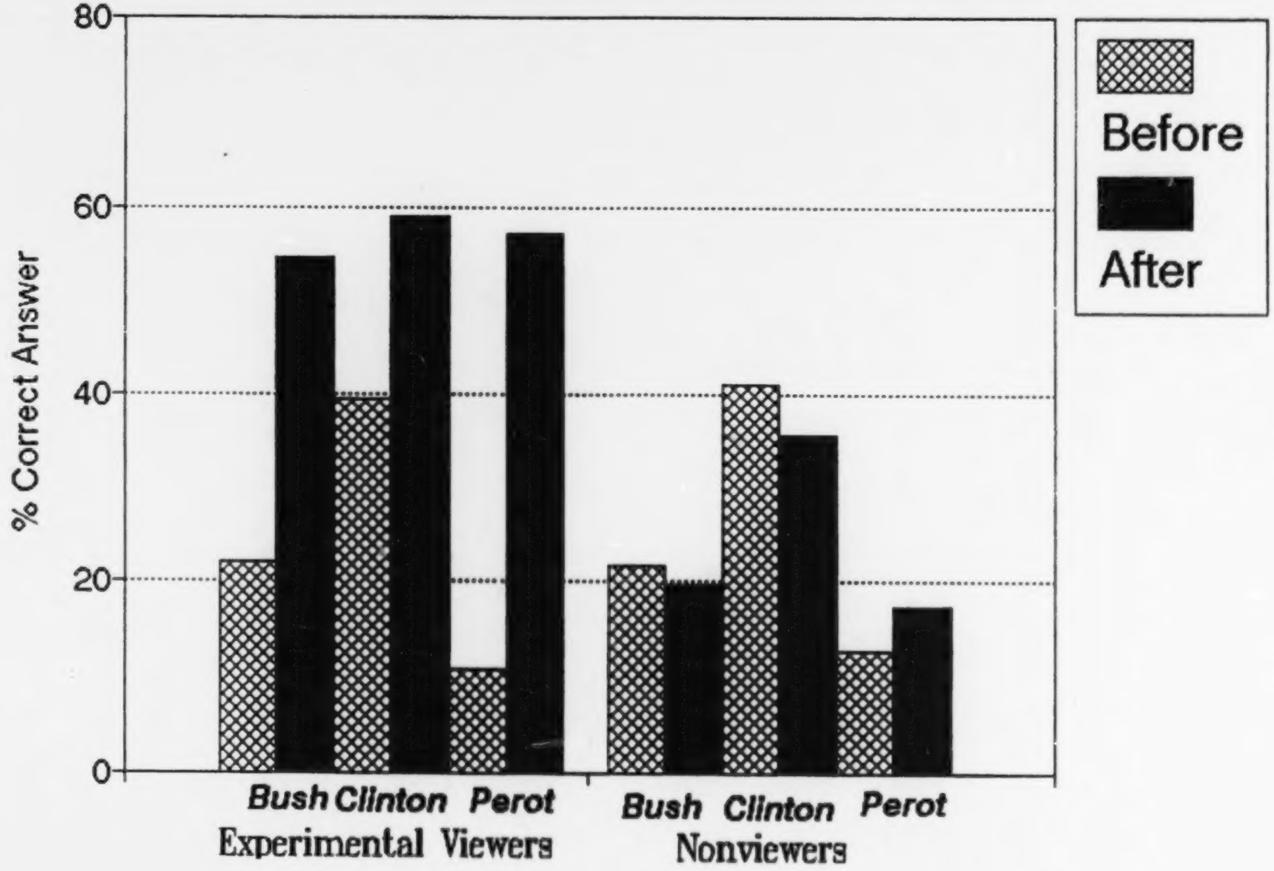
Integrity:
#14. Trustworthy ... Untrustworthy
#15. Sincere ... Insincere
#33. Honest ... Dishonest
(The Cronbach's Alpha of the three items for Bush is .87 at time 1 and .87 at time 2; for Clinton is .79 at time 1 and .84 at time 2; for Perot is .81 at time 1 and .80 at time 2.)

Charisma
#16. Pleasant ... Unpleasant
#17. Warm personality ... Cold personality
#31. Friendly ... Unfriendly
(The Cronbach's Alpha of the three items for Bush is .82 at time 1 and .89 at time 2; for Clinton is .80 at time 1 and .87 at time 2; for Perot is .80 at time 1 and .89 at time 2.)

Communication Skills
#9. Expressive ... Unexpressive
#10. Clear ... Vague
#12. Speaks in specifics ... Speaks in generalities
(The Cronbach's Alpha of the three items for Bush is .70 at time 1 and .67 at time 2; for Clinton is .65 at time 1 and .72 at time 2; for Perot is .65 at time 1 and .71 at time 2.)

FIGURE 1

Knowledge Score of Debated Issues



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MEDIA PRIMING IN THE 1992 ELECTION CAMPAIGN

THE EFFECTS OF NEWSPAPER STORIES ON EVALUATIONS OF PRESIDENT BUSH

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Paper presented to the Mass Communication and Society Division of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Annual Convention, Kansas City, MO, August 1993.

MEDIA PRIMING IN THE 1992 ELECTION CAMPAIGN: THE EFFECTS OF NEWSPAPER STORIES ON EVALUATIONS OF PRESIDENT GEORGE BUSH

This study examines the priming effects of newspaper stories on political assessments of President Bush during the 1992 presidential election campaign. Based on the spreading-activation model for priming, the author explores whether negative cognitive and affective prime cues can facilitate the recall of related negative information about the president from long-term memory and whether this effect is conditioned by the subject's need for political orientation.

To demonstrate that the print media can indirectly influence the standards by which the electorate evaluates the president, 140 undergraduate students were experimentally exposed to news stories containing prime cues about the recession and President Bush. Results compared priming effects for stories discussing the recession with stories that additionally featured emotional statements or discussions of Bush's competence and leadership abilities.

The study concluded that printed news stories can prime cognitive and affective perceptions of President Bush. Negative prime cues negatively influenced subjects' perceptions of Bush's competence, leadership, job performance, and feelings toward him in all experimental conditions. Subjects' perception of the recession as a national problem and their knowledge about Bush, on the other hand, were not influenced by priming.

Strong support was found for the hypothesis that cognitive and affective evaluations can be mentally linked via the spreading-activation of prime cues. Subjects primed with news stories that discussed exclusively the recession (cognitive prime) felt as negative toward Bush as those primed with recession stories that featured additional material on Bush's handling of the recession (cognitive and affective prime).

While the priming effect of stories containing affective prime cues was less pronounced, the combination of cognitive and affective prime cues strongly facilitated the recall of related thoughts about Bush. As predicted, evaluations of Bush's overall job performance were primed most successfully for subjects with a moderate and high need for political orientation.

Introduction

One problem of agenda-setting research has been the often unchallenged assumption that the media may not be very successful in telling us what to think, but very successful in telling us what to think about (Cohen, 1963). Many agenda-setting studies adopted the limited media effects model and supported McCombs and Shaw's (1972, p. 177, italics added) original claim that "the mass media may have little influence on the *direction or intensity* of attitudes." However, by limiting agenda-setting effects on audience cognition to changes in *issue* salience (what to think about), researchers often ignored effects the media might have on links between political cognition and attitude formation. During election campaigns, such a link might exist, for example, if the media make salient certain issues or candidate attributes that enable the voter to assign a favorable or unfavorable value to a political candidate.

In answer to calls for increased attention to cognitive behavior (Becker et al., 1975; Reeves et al., 1982), new models of political media effects have been developed, focusing on cognitive factors that consider the constraints of bounded rationality found in voters' assessments and evaluations of political candidates. Iyengar and Kinder (1987), for example, claim that people depend more heavily on political information that is most accessible in memory and comes to mind spontaneously and effortlessly when faced with a judgment or choice. According to this theory of cognitive priming, "the more attention television news pays to a particular problem--the more frequently a problem area is primed--the more viewers should incorporate what they know about that problem into their overall judgment of a president". (p. 65)

Media priming research conducted during the past ten years has found strong empirical support for the hypothesis that television coverage of US presidential performance not only heightens viewer cognizance of certain issues, but also sets the standards by which presidential performance is judged (Iyengar et al., 1982; Iyengar et al., 1984; Krosnick and Kinder, 1990; Schleuder et al., 1991; Cameron et al., 1991). However, empirical support for media-priming was found almost exclusively for television newscasts. Media channel characteristics, however, are crucial determinants of cognition because the processing of visual and verbal messages from television differs significantly from information processed through reading text (Weinstein et al.,1980). Thus, a focus on the effects of printed news stories on political cognition may help to determine media characteristics, other than content, that will influence mental processing.

Another important variable that has been shown to influence voting behavior but has not been examined in the context of priming, is political affect. As Iyengar and Kinder (1985, p. 119) have pointed out, especially during election campaigns, dramatic news stories about national problems may evoke strong emotions in the audience by directly boosting the importance the audience assigns to these issues or by focusing attention on the triggering stimulus.

To expand the original agenda-setting and priming theory with new data on cognitive and affective processes, this study will test the priming effect for the *print* media on candidate assessments in the 1992 presidential election campaign. Similar to previous media priming research, it is hypothesized that when people read of either a political event or the president, certain ideas are activated that, for a short period, tend to evoke other semantically related thoughts or ideas that shape the standards by which presidential candidates are judged (Iyengar and Kinder, 1987).

Unlike most media priming studies that emphasize only the activation of semantically thoughts, the present reasoning holds that priming can also activate related feelings or emotions. Specifically, it is hypothesized that negatively toned news stories about the recession and President Bush can prime related personal evaluations of the president and heighten the chance that negative feelings toward the president will come to mind spontaneously. If the priming effect of news stories is boosted by emotional statements, important implications can be drawn for the relationship between cognitive and affective media effects that might influence the outcome of political campaigns.

It is also proposed that each respondent's interest in the election campaign and his or her need for more information about the campaign, should influence the effects of media priming on candidate evaluation. People with an increased need for political orientation should actively seek out political information from the mass media and might pay closer attention to potential priming cues (McCombs and Weaver, 1973; Weaver, 1977). Thus, the degree of need for orientation might positively influence media priming effects on respondents' issue salience and candidate assessments.

Cognitive Aspects of Candidate Evaluations

Central to most studies of voting behavior in presidential elections is the assumption that people partly base their evaluations of political candidates on what they can remember about the candidates' partisan policy positions and character traits. Recent studies examining voters' perceptions of political candidates show that people have cognitive structures, called "schemata," that organize and simplify their assessments of candidates and issues (Kinder et al., 1980; Miller et al., 1986; Fiske and Kinder, 1981). Miller, Wattenberg, and Malanschuk (1886, p. 535), for example, claim that "people have a preexisting knowledge of what a president should be like, and judge real candidates according to how well they match the elements of these schemas." According to this concept, voters store political beliefs, attitudes, and preferences along with rules for linking those concepts as abstract schemata in long-term memory. Complex political decisions and evaluations are then based on these schemata, which decrease complexity by relying on readily available political standards. Thus, political schemata not only "direct attention to relevant information, guide its interpretation and evaluation," but also "provide inferences when information is missing and ambiguous, and facilitate its retention," as Fiske and Kinder point out (1981, p. 173).

Most researchers who support this idea claim that when evaluating presidential candidates, people tend to use a limited number of traits they believe would make for an ideal president but are generally focused on schematic "personality" characteristics rather than on issue concerns or partisan group connections. According to Kinder and his colleagues, perceptions of the president:

> ... consist(s) of the features that citizens believe best define an exemplary president. Prototypes gain their psychological utility by the twin functions they are purported to perform in information processing. Prototypes both guide the encoding, retention, and recall of information, thereby contributing to economy in processing, and set the criteria that underlie evaluation. (1980, p. 316)

Thus, by measuring presidential candidates against a set of normative standards (e.g., prototypical characteristics such as presidential "integrity," "competence," or "leadership"), voters not only simplify the processing of new political information about the candidate, but also might make final judgments about the president (Miller et al., 1986; Kinder et al., 1980; Page, 1978; Kinder and Fiske, 1986).

The idea that political information and political messages may be interpreted differently as a function of recently activated constructs links the schemata approach to the theory of cognitive priming. Researchers interested in political cognition have suggested that campaigns and media coverage of candidates prime individuals to consider particular personality traits and political categories in their evaluations of the candidates. (Iyengar et al. 1984; Iyengar and Kinder, 1987; Conover and Feldman, 1986; Rahn et al., 1990; Sullivan et al., 1990). Based on the assumption of priming that people tend to interpret ambiguous stimuli in terms of the trait category that is most accessible, patterns of mass media use may trigger political schemata that may, in turn, influence attention and the ability to integrate subsequent political information (Reeves et al., 1982). Applied to presidential election campaigns, this means that extensive media coverage of the president is likely to activate audiences' political schemata, which, in turn, are based on performance perceptions of former presidents.

Links with Emotions: Kinder (1983) notes that presidents and presidential candidates can evoke strong feelings that are separate from the more cognitive elements of ideal presidential standards and that these emotions can contribute independently and powerfully to overall support. He concludes that "candidate popularity should be based not only on citizens' analysis of the candidate's personal traits and policy positions but also on the affective reactions the candidate evokes." (p. 416)

A growing body political science research has begun to focus less on cognitive perceptions of political candidates and more on the importance of the building of emotional bonds, or affect, between the candidates and voters. (Marcus, 1988; Conover and Feldman, 1986; Clemmer and Payne, 1991; Abelson et al., 1982). Fenno (1978), for example, suggested in the late 1970s that political bonds between candidates and voters are built not only on a demonstration of qualifications based on the issues and one's record, but also on affective bonds of identification and empathy between candidate and voter as well. Other more recent studies on emotional perception of presidential candidates have shown that feelings have strong predictive effects on candidate appraisal (Abelson et al., 1982), on issue appraisal (Conover and Feldman, 1986), and on political communication (Roseman et al., 1986).

Many psychological studies have shown that emotional experiences can be remembered the same way events or thoughts are remembered. Brown and Kulik (1977), for example, describe the detailed "flashbulb memories" that people commonly retain of the circumstances surrounding unexpected and emotionally involving events. Similarly, Matlin (1989) comments that after the details of an event have faded from memory, we can often recall our emotional reaction to the event. Several other studies have also shown that affective orientations mediate the recall of schemata that are applied to ambiguous patterns of stimuli or that are recalled from memory--even if people are not aware of their emotional state (Crockett, 1988; Zajonc, 1980; Velten, 1968).

Overall, these studies suggest that affect may indeed "constitute a category in memory and feelings can then serve as retrieval cues" (Isen, 1987, p. 223) and that emotion "is often a central component of cognitive processes in general" (Gilligan and Bower, 1984, p. 579). Pertinent to this study is that presidential trait categories such as "competence," "leadership," "trust," or "reliability" may not be purely semantic representations but may be imbued with affect (Allport, 1954; Fiske, 1982; Fiske et al., 1987; Fiske and Pavelchak, 1987; Erber, 1991). If that is true, it should be possible to prime emotional responses to the president with affective statements about issues that can be mentally related to those affect-imbued political memories.

Links with Need for Orientation: While many communication studies show that political knowledge and involvement increase political media effects, it is reasonable to assume that voters also have different degrees of political uncertainty about a presidential candidate and that their perceptions of the importance of voting differ significantly from person to person. Such personal differences in political perceptions should strongly influence the effect of political media messages. Especially those voters who think that voting is important, but are also very insecure about their vote choice, might turn to the media for more information about the candidates and their policies.

In 1973, McCombs and Weaver (1973; Weaver, 1977; Weaver, 1980), introduced the idea of *need for orientation* in terms of two less abstract concepts, namely political "relevance" and political "uncertainty." The authors assert that the cognitive need for orientation is characterized by three different levels: On the first level, low relevance--regardless of degree of uncertainty--results in a low need for orientation. The second level combines high relevance and low uncertainty to result in a moderate need for orientation. The third level joins high relevance and high uncertainty to result in a high need for orientation. Using a variety of measures for these concepts, the authors generally found that the greater the person's need for orientation, the greater the amount of exposure to political mass communication. And the greater the need for orientation, the closer the match between voters' agendas and the agendas of the media.

Rationale and Research Hypotheses

Based on the perspective of social cognition theory that people have a need to simplify their environment because of their limited cognitive capacities and the potential problem of processing ambiguous or missing information (Fiske and Taylor, 1984), this study examines the process by which people evaluate a president's competence and leadership characteristics, as well as their feelings toward him, depending on the kind of media information they are exposed to. According to the theory of cognitive priming, news stories about a certain issue or the president's relation to it should activate semantically related concepts or ideas about the president's competence or leadership abilities in long-term memory (Anderson and Bower, 1973; Berkowitz and Rogers, 1986). Similarly, news stories that convey negative emotions or feelings about a certain issue should trigger related negative feelings toward the president in long-term memory, as predicted by the network model of emotions.

Specifically, this study theorizes that, through priming, printed news stories about the economic recession in the United States can influence the priorities that people attach to this problem and related considerations they take into account as they evaluate incumbent President Bush (Iyengar et al., 1984). According to the proposed model, primed information about the recession should have more impact on evaluations of the president than other equally relevant, but nonprimed, information either because the former receives preferential attentional processing or is seen as more important or more relevant to the judgment at hand. Thus, readers exposed to news about the recession (prime) should rely more heavily on their assessments of this problem when evaluating President Bush as compared to readers exposed to no news about the recession.

As an extension of previous media priming research, this study also hypothesizes that subjects' assessments of President Bush are influenced by negative emotional statements about the recession issue. The present study emphasizes the possibility that negative affect in itself can involuntarily evoke negative reactions. When primed with negative emotional cues, a person's memory selectively retrieves the negative facts and opinions. Based on the assumption that cognitive and emotional cues can spread through the mental network of respondents exposed to such cues, news stories featuring negative, emotional statements about the recession should trigger related concepts and feelings about the president and his leadership ability in handling the recession. Thus, people primed with negative political cues should also tend to look for evidence of "negative" political behavior in the president ("snap judgment," Tversky and Kahneman, 1981). Extensive negative coverage of the recession issue featuring emotional statements (anger, sadness, or fear) from people negatively affected by the recession should increase the perceived importance of the recession issue and should also result in a more negative overall assessment of President Bush and his current performance in relation to the recession (prime).

This study also examines the potential impact of the respondents' varying need for orientation on media priming. As discussed above, people who approach new information with a higher degree of political interest or a particular goal not only should process information more efficiently, but, also as a result of this orientation, should activate related ideas or schema in memory better than those less interested or involved. Thus, a person's need for orientation, assessed here in terms of political interest and uncertainty about the candidates, should cause respondents to pay closer attention to media messages and thus should also heighten the effects of prime-related cues presented in the news stories. Those those subjects who think that voting is important--but are also very unsure in their vote choice and would like to have more information about the candidates and their policies--should rely more on prime-related information than subjects who are less interested and (or) already have decided for whom to vote.

Six main hypotheses were developed to address the various problems discussed above:

H1a: Recession-only prime: Subjects who read more news about the recession only (Group 1: recession primed, Bush not mentioned) will rank the **importance of the recession** as a national problem higher than subjects in a no-prime control group, as indicated by higher recession rank scores. H1b: Recession-primed subjects will also retrieve more information about President Bush as indicated by knowledge, competence, leadership, and overall affect scores that are stronger than those for the no-prime group.

H2a: Affect prime: Subjects who read more news about the recession featuring emotional statements about the recession (Group 2: recession & affect primed) will retrieve more **affect**-related information about Bush than subjects in a no-prime control group, as indicated by stronger affect scores for Bush. However, compared to the subjects primed with competence/leadership cues (Group 3: recession & competence/leadership primed), affect-primed subjects will exhibit weaker competence and leadership scores for Bush. H2b: Affect-primed subjects will also retrieve more information about Bush as indicated by knowledge, competence, and leadership scores that are stronger than those for the no-prime group.

H3a: Competence/Leadership prime: Subjects who read more news about Bush's stands on the recession issue (Group 3: recession & competence/leadership primed) will retrieve more **competence and leadership** related information about Bush than subjects in a no-prime control group, as indicated by stronger competence and leadership scores for Bush. However, compared to the subjects primed with affect cues (Group 2: recession & affect primed), competence/ leadership-primed subjects will exhibit weaker overall affect scores for Bush. H3b: Competence and leadership-primed subjects will also retrieve more information about Bush as indicated by knowledge and overall affect scores that are stronger than those for the no-prime group.

H4a: Combination Prime: Subjects who read more news about Bush's stand on the recession and featuring emotional statements about the recession (Group 4: recession & affect & competence/ leadership primed) will retrieve more **affect, competence and leadership** related information about Bush than subjects in a no-prime control group, as indicated by stronger affect, competence and leadership scores for Bush. As a result of the interaction of affect and competence/leadership prime cues, subjects in Group 4 will also exhibit the *strongest* competence, leadership, and overall affect scores for Bush among all four experimental groups. H4b: Combination-primed subjects will also retrieve more information about Bush as indicated by knowledge scores that are stronger than those for the no-prime group.

H5a: Overall Approval: Subjects who read more news about the recession or Bush's competence in handling the recession (Group 1, 2, 3, and 4) will rank Bush's overall job approval lower than people in a no-prime control group, as indicated by lower overall approval scores. H5b: Subjects who read more news about the recession or Bush's competence in handling the recession (Group 1, 2, 3, and 4) will exhibit a stronger impact of recession salience, overall affect toward Bush, and perceptions of his competence and leadership abilities on **overall job approval** than subjects in a no-prime control group.

H6: Need for Orientation: Subjects with a moderate or high need for orientation who read any of the above described stories (Group 1, 2, 3, and 4 combined) will generally retrieve more prime-related information than subjects with a lower need for orientation, as indicated by stronger knowledge, affect, competence, leadership, and overall approval scores for Bush.

METHODOLOGY

Subjects: One-hundred-forty Indiana University undergraduates who were enrolled in introductory journalism classes in the fall semester 1992 completed the experiment in April and May of 1992 on a voluntary basis. Because of the usual over-representation of female students in undergraduate journalism courses, only 28.6 percent of the participants were male.

Design: The study used a posttest-only control group design to examine the priming effect of the print media. Twenty-seven students were randomly assigned to each of five different experimental conditions: Participants in Group 1 read two news stories exclusively discussing the economic recession, while students in the Group 2 read two news stories that additionally featured emotional statements or quotes from people who were negatively affected by the recession. Neither type of story mentioned President Bush or linked him to the recession issue. Participants in Group 3, on the other hand, read two news stories about Bush's stands on the recession issue, implying little or no competence in his handling of the recession. To test the effect of interaction between stories containing either affect or competence cues, respondents in Group 4 were exposed to one story each from Group 2 (story featuring emotional statements but no links to Bush) and Group 3 (story about Bush's stand on the recession implying little presidential competence). Students in the control group (Group 5) were assigned to read three news stories that contained no priming cues relating to either the recession or President Bush, but were of about the same length and layout.[1]

To examine the priming effect of news stories in which a political candidate is named, this study includes two conditions in which President Bush is not mentioned as a political actor at all (Group 1 and Group 2). According to the priming theory, subjects primed only with recession cues, but not with the candidate's name or presence in the story, should exhibit the same (or slightly smaller) priming effect in terms of candidate evaluation than those who read news stories where the candidate is mentioned.

Development of Stimulus Material: Actual news stories about the recession--printed between January 1, 1992, and April 31, 1992--were collected from the New York Times, the Chicago Tribune, the Washington Post, the Los Angeles Tribune, and the Christian Science Monitor. All news stories that focused primarily on the US recession were retrieved from the NEXIS database.[2] Two recession stories were selected from the retrieved material to serve as base text for the four experimental conditions. Additionally, three news stories from the same newspapers, printed at about the same time and about the same length, but not concerned with the recession or President Bush, were chosen as reading material for the control group.

Because the two recession stories--which were used in all four experimental conditions--were to differ only in terms of the experimental stimulus (prime), a *neutral* paragraph was inserted in both stories addressing only the recession (Group 1: only recession primed, no reference to Bush).[3] For the three other experimental groups (Group 2: recession & affect primed; Group 3: recession & competence/ leadership primed; Group 4: recession & affect & competence/leadership primed), these prime-neutral paragraphs were then replaced with paragraphs containing the appropriate prime stimuli for each experimental condition. This procedure ensured that each experimental condition featured an equal amount of stimuli either about the recession only (no reference to Bush), emotional statements from people affected by the current recession (again no reference to Bush), or statements about President Bush's competence in handling the recession. The following paragraph is an example of prime-stimuli that was used in news stories featuring prime cues that are related to negative affect (Group 1/Group 4):

> "People are mighty angry out here, and I'm one of them," said Robert Duncan, a construction worker in Chicago. "We're fed up with the way things are going in this country. I'm sure as hell not scared of hard work. So why don't I have work? What's gone wrong?"

The assumption underlying the proposed effects of negative emotional statements such as being "mighty angry" or "fed up" with the recession is that they provide the reader with emotional cues that will trigger related negative feelings about Bush and his ability to handle the US economy. The next paragraph is an example of competence stimuli that was used in the news stories featuring prime cues related to "competence" and "presidential leadership" (Group 2 and Group 4):

> President Bush's economic recovery program--consisting of middle-income cuts, housing rebates and capital gains tax cuts--is a fraud. "Bush is offering cake to the rich, crumbs to the poor, while the middle class washes the dishes," snapped a Capitol Hill Democrat in a recent party meeting.

Again, it is assumed that subjects exposed to competence/leadership related prime cues such as "Bush's economic recovery plan...is a fraud" will incorporate these cues into their overall assessments of President Bush.

Dependent and Independent Measures: Students were asked after the experiment to rate (1) George Bush's overall performance as president, (2) his competence in handling the recession, (3) his leadership potential, and (4) their perceived salience of the recession issue. Other questions determined students' knowledge of George Bush, their need for orientation, their party identification, and gender.

Overall Job Performance Perception: Following Iyengar et al.'s approach, this study assesses overall performance of the president by asking respondents whether they generally approve or disapprove of the way President Bush is handling his job as a president on a 4-point scale (1 = approve strongly, 4 = disapprove strongly). Answers to this question measure respondents' general satisfaction with the political performance of the president not related to any particular problem or area of expertise.

Competence Perception: Presidential competence is assessed by asking respondents to rate on a 5-point scale how successful they think George Bush would be as president in fighting the current recession (1 = extremely successful, 5 = not successful at all). As an extension of the more general assessment of President Bush's overall performance, this question offers a more precise measure of presidential performance in a specified domain of politics: in this case, how well respondents think the president would be in handling the economic recession.

Leadership Perception: Presidential leadership was assessed with three questions, asking respondents to rate on a 4-point scale how well they think the terms "inspiring," "strong leader" and "knowledgeable" describe President Bush (4 = extremely well, 1 = not well at all). Factor analysis of the answers to all three leadership-terms revealed one factor, termed "presidential leadership perception," accounting for 65 percent of the total item-variation. To obtain a single leadership-score for each respondent, answers to the three terms were added into a single scale (Cronb. alpha =.73).

Affect Perception: Studies that have addressed the dynamics of forming affective evaluations usually employed very rudimentary affective measures and crude conceptual analyses. This study follows Marcus (1988) who proposes instead a two-dimensional "circumplex model of emotion" that identifies seven discrete emotions (angry, hopeful, afraid of him, proud, disgusted, sympathetic toward him, uneasy) representing two dimensions of emotional response: "mastery" (positive emotionality) and "threat" (negative emotionality).

Following this model, positive and negative affect toward President Bush was assessed by asking respondents to rate on a 3-point scale (1 = often, 2 = sometimes, 1 = never) whether something about Bush, because of the kind of person he is or because of something he has done, ever made them have feelings like being (1) afraid of him, (2) angry, (3) disgusted, or (4) uneasy, (1) happy, (2) hopeful, (3) proud, or (4) sympathetic toward him. The first four terms represent negative affect or feelings toward Bush, while the latter four represent positive affect toward him.[4]

Factor analysis of all eight affect measures resulted in two distinct factors, termed "positive affect" and "negative affect," each accounting for about 61 percent of the total variation. To obtain a single positive and a single negative affect scale score, respondents' answers to the four positive affect measures were added into a positive affect scale (range: 0 to 1), while answers to the four negative affect measures were added into a negative affect scales (range: 0 to -1). The resulting two composite affect scales measure positive and negative feelings toward Bush (Cronb. alpha = .78 for each scale).

To combine positive and negative affect scores into a single "overall affect" scale, each respondent's positive affect scale-scores were subtracted from the negative affect scale-score (zero-order correlation between positive and negative affect-scale = .55, $p < .01$). The resulting "overall affect" index (range: -1 to 1) measures affect as a relative difference between positive and negative affect toward President Bush.

Recession Salience: The salience of the recession issue was assessed by asking students to rank the importance of the "economy/recession" as an issue facing the nation today against five other issues (health care, the environment, education, defense, and AIDS). The priming effect of news stories is defined as the difference between the rank (salience) readers in the prime group assign to the recession issue compared to the importance readers in the no-prime group assign to the recession.

Need for Orientation: Need for orientation was measured by combining the respondents' scores for political relevance and political uncertainty. Political relevance was assessed by asking respondents (1) how interested they are in following the presidential election campaign, and (2) how much they care who wins the presidential election in November. Students who claimed to be "very interested" and to care "very much" about who would win the presidential election were assigned to the high political relevance group. Students who were interested or cared only "somewhat" or "not at all" were assigned to the low relevance group. Political uncertainty, on the other hand, was assessed by asking respondents how much more information, if any, they need to understand the presidential campaign (none, very little, some, or a good deal).[5] Students who claimed that they need "a good deal" more information to understand the election were assigned to the high uncertainty group, while students who thought they need "none," "very little," or "some" information were assigned to the low uncertainty group.

Students were then grouped into three levels of need for orientation: On the first level, low relevance--regardless of degree of uncertainty--results in a low need for orientation (Group III, score = 0). The second level combines high relevance and low uncertainty to result in a moderate need for orientation (Group II, score = 1). The third level joins high relevance and high uncertainty to result in a high need for orientation (Group I, score = 2).[6]

Knowledge about President Bush: Candidate knowledge was assessed by asking students five questions about President Bush's past life: (1) Bush is a veteran of which war? (2) what is Bush's wife's first name? (3) when was Bush elected president? (4) Bush is a legal resident of which state? and (5) what was Bush's position before becoming Vice-President?

Control Variables: To control for effects of political party identification students were asked at the end of the questionnaire how they would describe their political leaning on a seven-point scale: strong (1) or weak Democrat (2), strong (3) or weak Republican (4), strong (5) or weak Independent (6), or other (7). To control for the high number of female journalism students, a question for sex of the respondent was also included.[7]

Findings

In the next three sections, findings for each of the six hypotheses are discussed in numerical order. In the first section, priming effects on evaluations of President Bush are analyzed with one-way analysis of covariance (ANACOVA). One-way analysis of covariance is performed between the control group and each of the four different prime groups, while controlling for the effects of party identification (Democrats, Republican) and sex (1 = male).

To test Iyengar and Kinder's original priming hypothesis (here formulated as Hypothesis 5a and 5b), which claims that perceptions of the presidents' overall job performance can be influenced by priming increased issue salience or related categories such as "competence" or "presidential leadership," the second section employs multiple regression analysis. This allows us to compare the relative effects of each independent variable on "overall job performance" within and between the four prime groups and the control group.

Similarly, the third section analyzes the conditional effect of need for orientation on media priming with multiple regression analysis. However, because of the small number of cases that would result from subdividing each experimental group in a low, moderate, and high need for orientation group, all four experimental groups were combined into one prime group (N=112) and then analyzed as a whole.

Recession Prime: Hypothesis 1a predicted that students who read more news about the recession (Group 1: recession-only primed) prior to completing the questionnaire would rank the recession issue higher as a national problem than students in a no-prime control group. One-way analysis of covariance does not produce the predicted differences between control and prime group [F(1,56) = .42, n.s.].[8] Subjects primed with stories exclusively covering the recession ranked the importance of the recession as a national problem only slightly higher than subjects in the control group. In fact, students in all four experimental groups ranked the importance of the recession issue about the same.[9]

Figure 1 about here

Hypothesis 1b also predicted that students primed with news about the recession would retrieve more information about President Bush than students who were not primed. According to the priming theory, increased exposure to the recession issue should influence the evaluations of the president, as indicated by knowledge, competence, leadership, and overall affect scores for Bush that are stronger than those for subjects in the control group. Because all stories stressed the negative aspects of the recession, especially the recall of negative information should be facilitated.

Results of one-way analysis of covariance generally support this hypothesis. Compared to subjects in the control group, students primed with the recession issue (Group 1: recession-only primed) evaluated Bush lower on competence [F(1,56) = 3.14, $p < .10$] and presidential leadership (knowledgeable, inspiring, strong leader) [F(1,56) = 4.23, $p < .05$]. As predicted, competence and leadership scores for Bush were less strongly influenced in the recession-only prime group than in the groups primed with competence/leadership cues. Surprisingly, subjects in the recession-only prime group also exhibited the strongest overall affect toward Bush [F(1,56) = 11.28, $p < .01$], expressed as strong negative (mean: .72 vs. .57 in control group) and weak positive feelings toward President Bush (mean .50 vs. .60 in control group). Contrary to the prediction of priming theory, however, subjects in the recession-only prime group did not exhibit an increased knowledge about Bush's general background [F(1,56) = 1.94, n.s.].

Overall, results for Hypothesis 1b provide a moderate fit for the priming theory of political evaluations. Although increased exposure to the recession issue did not increase the salience of the recession itself, recession-only stories were very successful in facilitating the retrieval of negative evaluations of Bush from memory. Despite the fact that Bush was not linked explicitly to the recession in the news stories read by Group 1, raising the salience of this issue led to negative feelings about Bush.[10]

Affect Prime: Hypothesis 2a predicted that subjects who read more news about the recession that also featured emotional statements (Group 2: recession & affect primed) will retrieve more negative affect related information about Bush than students in a no-prime control group, as indicated by stronger affect scores for Bush. Data obtained from subjects primed with emotional statements about the recession generally support this hypothesis. Subjects primed with news stories that featured negative affect prime-cues exhibited not only more negative affect toward Bush, but also less positive affect compared to students in the no-prime control group. However, the difference between negative and positive affect in the affect-primed group (here expressed as "overall affect") is the smallest among all four experimental conditions.

Figure 2 about here

This puzzling effect of news stories featuring affect-primes is underscored by the finding that, compared to the other three experimental groups, the F-value for the group main effect is smallest among the subjects primed with affect cues [F(1,56) = 4.66, $p < .05$]. Also, compared to subjects primed with competence cues, affect-primed subjects exhibit only marginally smaller competence scores (mean: .80 versus .81 mean for subjects primed with competence), despite the fact that these news stories did not mention Bush in any way.

Hypothesis 2b predicted that affect-primed students will also retrieve more information about Bush as indicated by knowledge, competence, and leadership scores that are stronger than those for the no-prime group. Only partial support is found for this hypothesis. Although--as predicted--subjects in Group 2 thought of Bush as less competent in handling the economy [F(1,56) = 4.1, $p < .05$], presidential leadership scores [F(1,56) = 1.57, n.s.] and knowledge about Bush's social background [F(1,56) = 1.53, n.s.] were not affected by the affect-prime condition.

Overall, these results suggest that news stories featuring negative emotional statements about the recession were not as effective in priming related negative feelings about Bush as were stories exclusively about the recession or about Bush's competence in handling the economy.[11] The question remains, however, why news stories about the recession that did not contain any references to Bush were so effective in priming negative feelings toward Bush. Furthermore, subjects primed with emotional cues evaluated Bush's *overall* job performance as negatively as subjects in the three other experimental groups.

Competence/Leadership Prime: Hypothesis 3a predicted that students who read more news about Bush's stands on the recession issue (Group 3: recession & competence/leadership primed) will retrieve more competence and leadership related information about Bush than students in a no-prime control group, as indicated by stronger competence and leadership scores for Bush. Results from one-way analysis of covariance support this hypothesis. Competence [F(1,56) = 5.10, $p < .05$] and presidential leadership scores [F(1,56) = 7.40, $p < .01$] were significantly lower for subjects in the competence/leadership-prime group than for subjects in the no-prime control group.

Figure 3 and 4 about here

Compared to subjects primed with affect cues (mean: -.11), however, competence/ leadership-primed subjects exhibited much stronger overall affect scores (mean -.21). Even after controlling for party identification and sex this effect of the competence/leadership prime cues on affect perceptions remained significant ([F(1,56)=17.29, $p < .000$] compared to [F(1,56) = 4.66, $p < .05$] in the affect-prime group).

Hypothesis 3b also predicted that competence/leadership primed subjects will retrieve more information about Bush as indicated by stronger knowledge and overall affect scores than those for the no-prime group. Again, only partial support is found for this hypothesis. As mentioned above, especially overall affect was influenced strongly by the competence score. Know-ledge about President Bush, on the other hand, was not affected by news stories containing references to Bush's competence in handling the recession [F(1,56) = .61, n.s.].

Overall, news stories featuring prime cues about Bush's competence or presidential leadership were very effective in priming related competence and leadership evaluations about Bush. Interestingly, these stories were also very effective in priming negative emotion toward Bush, possibly a result of directly mentioning Bush in the stories. However, it should be noted that stories about the recession only (not referring to Bush) were as effective in priming negative emotions toward Bush as were the stories that additionally contained competence and presidential leadership cues.

Affect and Competence/Leadership Prime: Hypothesis 4a predicted that students who read one news story about Bush's stand on the recession and one news story that featured emotional statements about the recession (Group 4: recession & affect & competence/leadership primed) will retrieve more affect and competence/leadership related information about Bush than students in a no-prime control group, as indicated by stronger affect, competence, and leadership scores for

Bush. Findings obtained by one-way analysis of covariance support this hypothesis. The combination of affect and competence/leadership primes especially influenced ratings of Bush's competence in handling the recession [F(1,56) = 11.35, $p < .001$] and perceptions of his presidential leadership [F(1,56)=9.46, $p < .01$], while overall affect was less affected [F(1,56) = 7.63, $p < .01$]. Subjects primed with affective and competence/leadership-related prime cues generally rated Bush's competence and presidential leadership the lowest among all four experimental conditions.

Hypothesis 4a also stated that, as a result of the interaction of affect and competence/ leadership prime cues, subjects in Group 4 will also exhibit the *strongest* competence, leadership, and overall affect scores for President Bush among all four experimental groups. A comparison of F-values for group main effect on competence and leadership scores across all four experimental conditions partly supports this hypothesis: F-values for competence and leadership perception are by far the largest and most significant among the four experimental groups, even after controlling for party affiliation and sex. However, F-values for overall affect turned out to be relatively weak.

Hypothesis 4b predicted that students primed with a combination of affect and competence/leadership primes will also retrieve more information about Bush, as indicated by knowledge scores that are stronger than those for the no-prime control group. Moderate support is found for this hypothesis. Contrary to the non-significant priming effects found for primed Bush-knowledge in Groups 1, 2 and 3, subjects primed with both cognitive and emotional cues (Group 4) retrieved slightly more social background information about George Bush than students in the control group [F(1,56) = 3.83, $p < .10$].

Overall, news stories featuring both affective statements about the recession and references to Bush's handling of the economy proved to be the most effective in priming cognitive evaluations of Bush (competence, leadership, and overall approval). Affective evaluations (positive and negative affect), on the other hand, were less influenced.

Overall Job Approval: Hypothesis 5 predicted that students who read more news about the recession or Bush's competence in handling the recession (Groups 1-4) will evaluate Bush's overall job performance lower than people in a no-prime control group, as indicated by lower overall job approval scores for Bush. Findings for all four groups strongly support this hypothesis. Although the group mean for overall job approval are fairly similar, one-way analysis of covariance reveals that the priming effects of increased exposure to news about the recession on overall job approval are all significantly different from the no-prime control group (Group 1 [F(1,56) = 5.38, $p < .05$]; Group 2 [F(1,56) = 8.34, $p < .01$]; Group 3 [F(1,56) = 4.48, $p < .05$]; Group 4 [F(1,56) = 7.85, $p < .01$]). As predicted, respondents exposed to negative information about the recession also rated Bush's overall job approval lower in all four experimental groups, providing further support for the prediction of negative media priming effects.

Figure 5 about here

Hypothesis 5b predicted that subjects in all four experimental groups will also exhibit a stronger impact of recession salience, Bush knowledge, overall affect toward Bush, and perceptions of his competence and leadership abilities on overall job approval than subjects in the no-prime control group.

To test the relative importance of the independent variables on overall job approval within each of the four experimental groups, multiple regression analysis is employed.[12] Effects of exposure to prime cues are tested with the same five independent variables that are used in the original ANACOVA analyses. As Table 1 shows, Hypothesis 5b is not supported by the findings. Although the priming effect seems to work in the predicted direction, most differences between the primed experimental groups and the no-prime control group (expressed as differences between unstandardized OLS-estimates) are not significant. In the few cases where differences between the estimates reach significance (the impact of increased knowledge on overall job approval in Group 1 and 3, and of competence perceptions in Group 2), OLS-coefficients themselves are not significant for the primed group ($p > .10$).

Table 1 about here

Thus, although students generally rated Bush's overall performance lower when exposed to news stories about the recession (as indicated by the one-way analysis of covariance), it seems that the weight of each specific evaluation (recession salience, Bush-knowledge, competence, presidential leadership, and overall affect) did not significantly influence this effect.

Effects of Need for Orientation on Priming: Hypothesis 6 predicted that students with a moderate or high need for orientation who read more news about the recession (Groups 1-4) will generally retrieve more prime-related information than students with a lower need for orientation, as indicated by stronger recession salience, Bush-knowledge, competence, presidential leadership, and overall affect scores for President Bush.[13] Overall, strong empirical support is found for Hypothesis 6. Generally, students who are more interested in the election campaign and have little or high uncertainty about which candidate or party to support (moderate and high need for orientation) are most susceptible to media priming compared to those who are not interested in the campaign at all (low need for orientation). However, there are important differences between the three "need for orientation" groups in terms of cognitive and affective priming effects observed: for respondents with a moderate need for orientation, increased recession salience ($B = .23, p < .01$), Bush-knowledge ($B = .40, p < .05$), and especially lower leadership perceptions of Bush ($B = -1.28, p < .001$) lead to lower evaluations of Bush's overall job performance.[14] For respondents with a high need for orientation, on the other hand, lower perceptions of Bush's competence ($B = .71, p < .01$) and presidential leadership ($B = -.37, p < .10$) caused students to evaluate Bush's overall job performance lower. Recession salience and general knowledge about Bush had no effect on perceptions of Bush's overall job performance in this group.

Of special interest are the findings for students with a low need for orientation: Only in this group does overall affect toward Bush have a significant influence on evaluations of Bush's overall performance (B = -.26, $p < .001$). At the same time, effects of competence (B = -.30, $p < .05$) and presidential leadership (B = -.26, $p < .10$) on overall job approval are much weaker in this group.

Thus, respondents with a low need for orientation exhibit weaker cognitive priming effects than respondents with a moderate or high need for orientation. Affective prime cues, on the other hand, influence evaluations of overall job approval only for students with a low need for orientation. Overall, especially a moderate level of need for orientation boosts the priming effects of cognitively oriented variables (recession salience, competence, leadership), while a low level of need for orientation increases primarily the weight of emotional components (positive and negative affect) important to evaluation of Bush's overall job performance.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Subjects in this study tended to think of President Bush more negatively after they were exposed to various forms of news about the recession. As predicted by the priming theory, cues about the recession and/or Bush's handling of this domestic crisis activated a variety related thoughts and ideas about Bush in the mind of the participating students. Despite the strong impact of party affiliation[15], negative cues influenced perceptions of Bush's competence, presidential leadership, and overall job performance *negatively* in all four experimental groups.

However, the priming effect of printed news stories not only improved the recall of related cognitive categories from long-term memory, but also facilitated the accessibility of affective categories linked to President Bush. Generally, all four experimental conditions successfully primed more negative feelings toward President Bush as compared to the control group. Interestingly, students primed with news stories that discussed *exclusively* the recession (Group 1) felt as negative toward Bush as those primed with recession stories that additionally featured material on Bush's handling of the economic recession (Group 3 or 4). In other words, though Bush was not linked explicitly to the recession in the stories read by students in Group 1, just raising the salience of this issue led to negative feelings toward Bush. The validity of this conclusion is further supported by the finding that students exclusively primed with cues about the recession (Group 1) also judged the president more negatively in terms of his competence and his presidential leadership. Overall, it seems that priming can influence affective evaluations of political candidates, even when there is no obvious connection in the story between the issue and the candidate. This effect should reflect previously established mental links between cognitive and affective categories in the mental network.

As expected, news stories that discussed Bush's ability to handle the economic recession (Group 3) were very effective in priming related perceptions of Bush's competence and presidential leadership. Interestingly, cognitive cues priming competence and presidential leadership influenced both cognitive and affective evaluations of President Bush. Compared to subjects in the control group, students exposed to news that explicitly linked the president to the recession (Group 3) not only rated the president's competence and leadership lower, but also exhibited much more negative feelings toward Bush.

Further support for the priming theory comes from students who read one news story that featured affective statements about the recession and one story that referred to Bush and the recession in an unemotional way (Group 4). Compared to the other three experimental groups, the combination of cognitive and affective prime cues proved to be the most effective in priming cognitive evaluations of President Bush (competence and presidential leadership). It appears that by priming both cognitive and affective categories related to the president, especially cognitive links between competence and presidential leadership are activated. As predicted, this effect was stronger than for prime cues that exclusively prime affective or cognitive dimensions of candidate evaluation.

While the combination of cognitive and affective prime cues seems especially successful in priming cognitive evaluations, news stories exclusively featuring affective prime cues (Group 2) were less effective in priming either affective or cognitive evaluations of the president. Thus, while cognitive prime cues strongly facilitate the recall and mental accessibility of both cognitive and affective categories, affective prime cues have a similar but much weaker effect. However, when combined, cognitive and affective prime cues primarily boost the accessibility of cognitive categories in long-term memory.

The strong priming effect found for the combination of cognitive and affective prime cues points to the existence of mental links between cognitive and affective evaluation-categories stored in long-term memory. If, in fact, the media can activate these mental links, primed affective categories (negative or positive feelings) that are associated with a particular candidate could "substitute" for missing cognitive (or factual) information about this candidate by linking affective and cognitive evaluations in the mind of the media user. Thus, voters might indeed use heuristic shortcuts for processing complex political information or events by automatically (unconsciously) linking feelings toward political candidates with pieces of factual information and thus arrive at a very accurate overall evaluation more quickly than by active reasoning.

As predicted, President Bush's overall job performance was evaluated more negatively by students in all four experimental groups as compared to students in the control group. The effect of negative priming on students' evaluations of Bush was especially strong in Group 2 (recession & affect primed) and Group 4 (recession & affect & competence/leadership primed). However, the influence of each primed category (Bush-knowledge, competence, presidential leadership, and overall affect) on evaluations of Bush's overall job performance appeared to be insignificant. Although students generally rated Bush's overall job performance lower when exposed to news stories about the recession (as indicated by group mean comparisons), it seems that the *weight* of each specific category does not significantly influence this effect.

Of course, these results conflict with the findings obtained from one-way analysis of covariance. However, the influence of each primed category on evaluations of Bush's overall job approval might be relatively small when entered into a multiple regression analysis because it was conducted with only 27 respondents in each group. Thus, it is likely that the potentially weak weights of each primed category on overall job approval are obscured by the high-powered statistical procedure of multiple regression analysis.

Subjects' level of "need for orientation," on the other hand, had a significant influence on the magnitude of media priming. Evaluations of overall job performance were primed most successfully for students who were highly interested in the campaign and had little uncertainty about which candidate or party to support (moderate need for orientation).[16] However, while students with a moderate need for orientation relied heavily on primed cognitive categories such as recession salience, competence, and presidential leadership when evaluating the president, increased reliance on these negatively primed categories had a *positive* impact on evaluations of Bush's overall job performance. Students who expressed little or no interest in the presidential election campaign (low need for orientation), on the other hand, primarily relied on affective prime cues (overall affect) when asked to evaluate Bush's overall job performance. Here, as predicted, the weight of each successfully primed category had a negative effect on evaluations of Bush's overall performance.

Two explanations can be offered for the fact that only students who were not interested in the campaign relied on their feelings when evaluating the president. First, it is very likely that the effects of the "need for orientation" model are primarily based on *cognitive* information processing. Thus, while a higher need for orientation might influence the perception of cognitively oriented variables such as competence or leadership perception, emotionally oriented perceptions (such as positive or negative affect toward Bush) might be less influenced.

Second, most of the students with a moderate need for orientation exhibited a strong influence of partisanship (Republican) on evaluations of Bush's overall job approval. This fact partly explains why these students also retrieved more knowledge about Bush's social background than students in the two other groups. Thus, although students with strong ties to the Republican party might have been successfully primed by media exposure to the recession issue in the moderate need for orientation group, it is possible that *negative* effects of this exposure on evaluations of Bush were suppressed. In other words, students with a Republican party affiliation and a moderate need for orientation were forced to recall what they already knew about Bush and the economy, but nevertheless felt obligated to rate the president positively.

Overall, it seems that a moderate and high need for orientation primarily boosts the priming effects of cognitive prime cues, while emotional prime cues are suppressed or ignored. Students with little or no interest in the election campaign, on the other hand, seem to rely more heavily on emotional components when evaluating the overall performance of the president.

Contrary to what was expected, students' ability to activate semantically related candidate knowledge via the spreading-activation model was not influenced by priming, possibly as a result of the cognitive assumption underlying the theory of media priming. Because priming assumes that subjects can only retrieve information that was previously stored in long-term memory, it is possible that a majority of the students who participated in this experimental study simply had not encountered the necessary information about Bush's social background before and thus were not able to retrieve the correct information from memory.

Also, exposure to news stories about the recession did not increase the perceived salience of the recession issue much. In all four experimental conditions, subjects ranked the importance of the recession as a national problem only slightly higher than subjects in the control group. While this result seemingly contradicts the agenda-setting assumption that increased media exposure to an issue also increases the perceived salience of that issue, findings suggest that most students were highly concerned about the recession, so that exposure to news about the economy probably could not elevate the salience of this issue anymore ("ceiling effect").

Various important implications have to be drawn from these findings: First, it appears that the print media are quite successful in priming political perceptions. Despite the expectation that televised images have a greater impact on people's perceptions than printed news stories, this study found persuasive support for the notion that students' evaluations of President Bush were strongly influenced by increased exposure to printed news stories.

Second, although exposure to news stories about the recession did not increase the salience of this issue (no agenda-setting effect), all news stories used in this experiment had important influences on related cognitive and affective perceptions of President Bush. While this effect is less important in day-to-day journalism, it becomes extremely important during election campaigns. If, as this study has shown, negative news coverage of important issues primes readers to evaluate political candidates more negatively, even though these candidates have not been mentioned in the news story, the same process might be true for positive coverage. Because most readers are probably unaware of such psychological effects of news coverage, the media might be more powerful than we think in determining our perceptions of and feelings toward political candidates simply by covering issues that can be *indirectly* linked to the candidates. As long as the reader can establish a mental link between the issue and a potential candidate, the print media might influence cognitive and affective perceptions to a great extent.

Third, if news about certain issues can set the standards by which the electorate evaluates presidential candidates on both a cognitive and emotional level, the ideal of a rational voter is seriously challenged. As we have seen, critical news coverage of issues that are not specifically related to the president can trigger the recall of related negative feelings about the president from long-term memory. The potential that the media might set the emotional basis of political evaluations, perhaps without the awareness of the media users, indicates that the media might influence political judgments that are not, or are only partially, controlled by rational reflection. Thus, perceptions of positive and negative feelings toward a presidential candidate should be recognized as important factors that might significantly influence political assessments and, ultimately, vote choices.

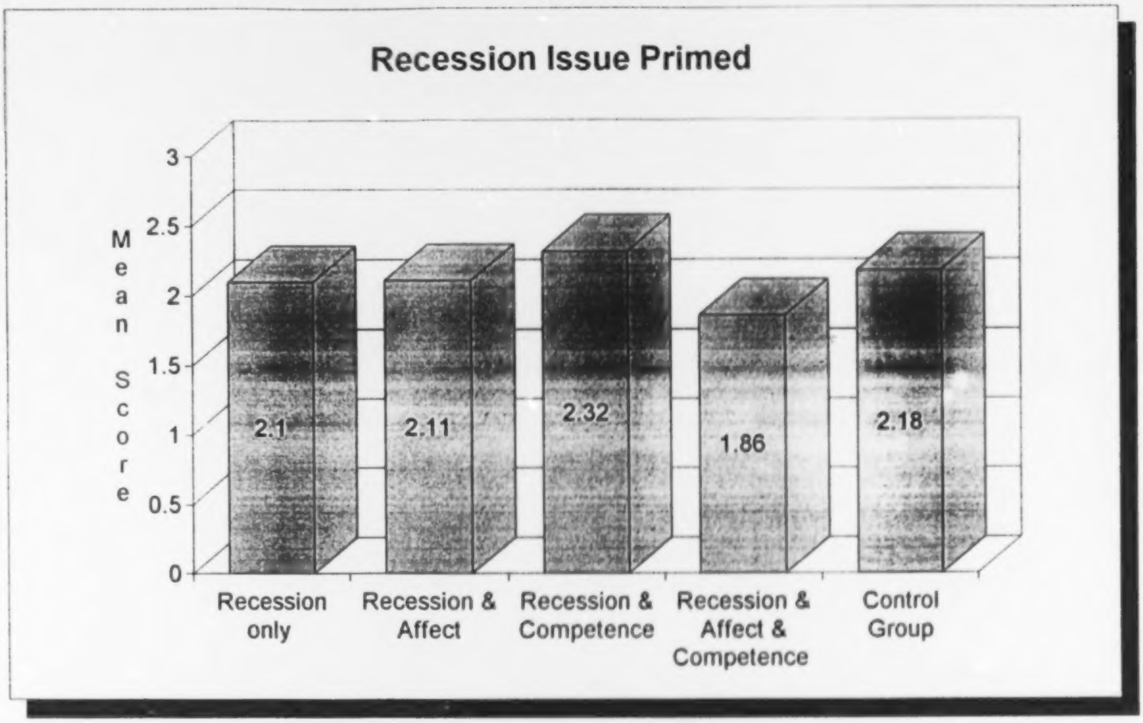

Figure 1: Mean Rank Score for Recession Issue as a Function of Priming.
(scale: 1 = highest rank, 6 = lowest rank)

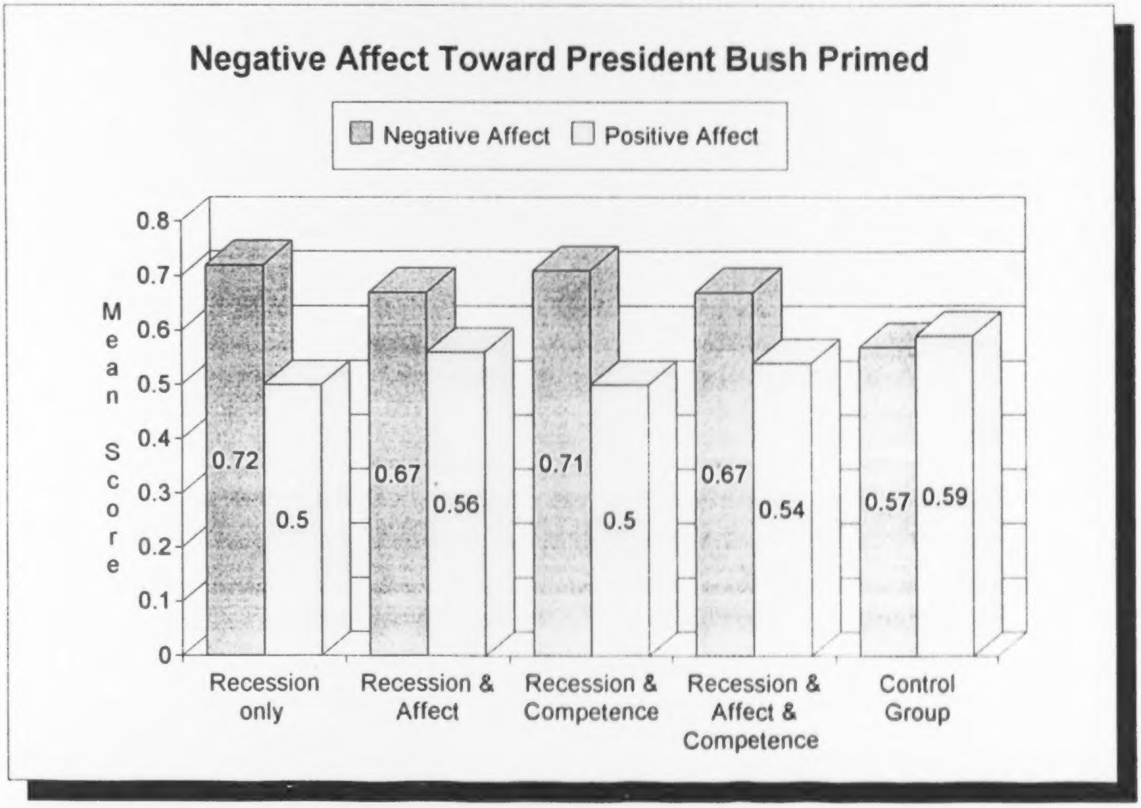

Figure 2: Mean Negative and Positive Affect Score as a Function of Priming. (scale: 0 = low negative/positive affect, 1 = high negative/positive affect)

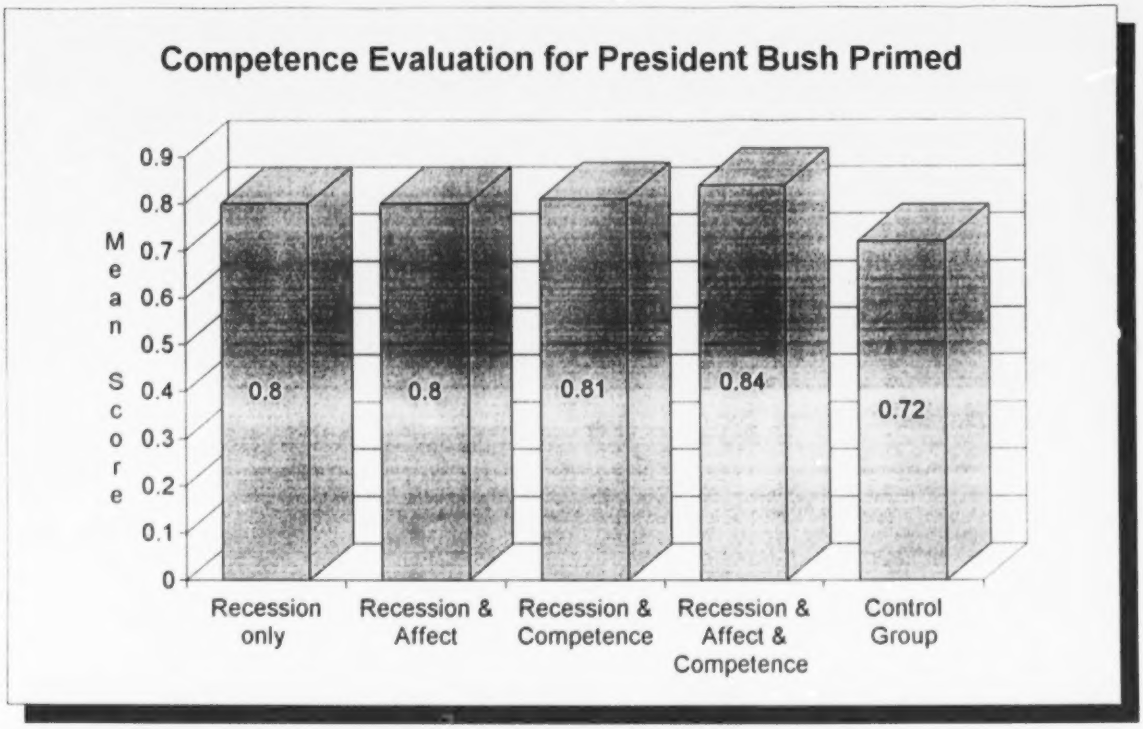

Figure 3: Mean Competence Score for Bush as a Function of Priming.
(scale: 0 = low competence, 1 = high competence)

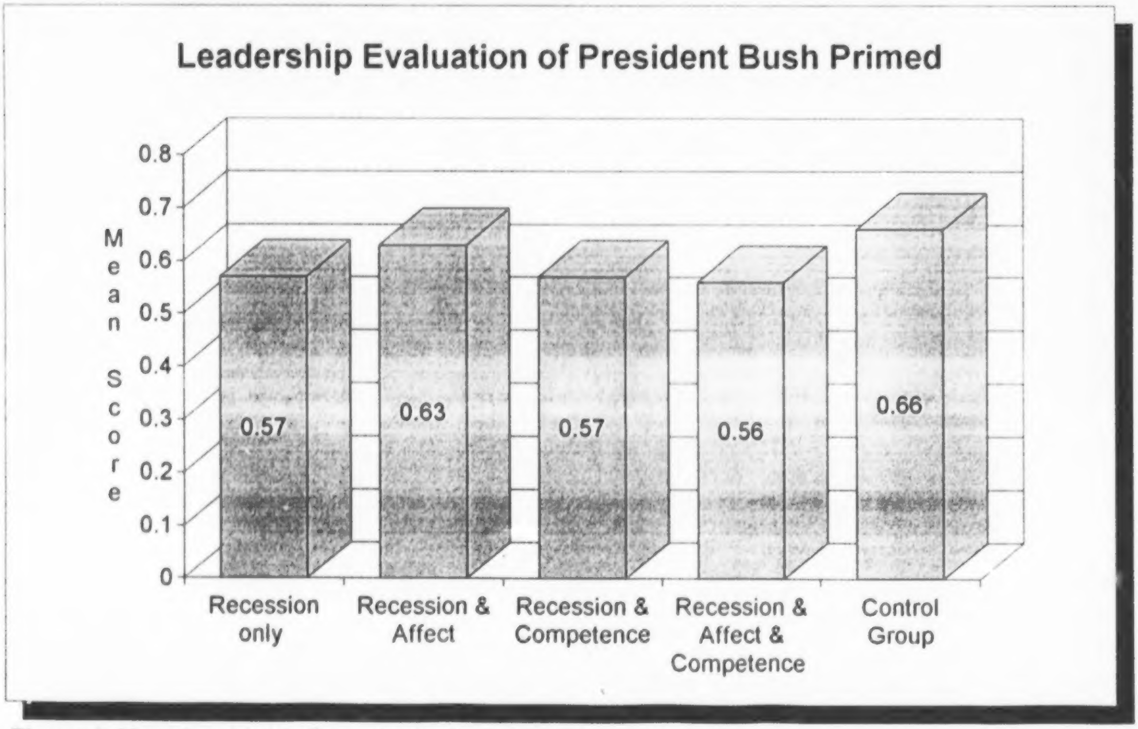

Figure 4: Mean Leadership Score for Bush as a Function of Priming.
(scale: 0 = high leadership, 1 = low leadership)

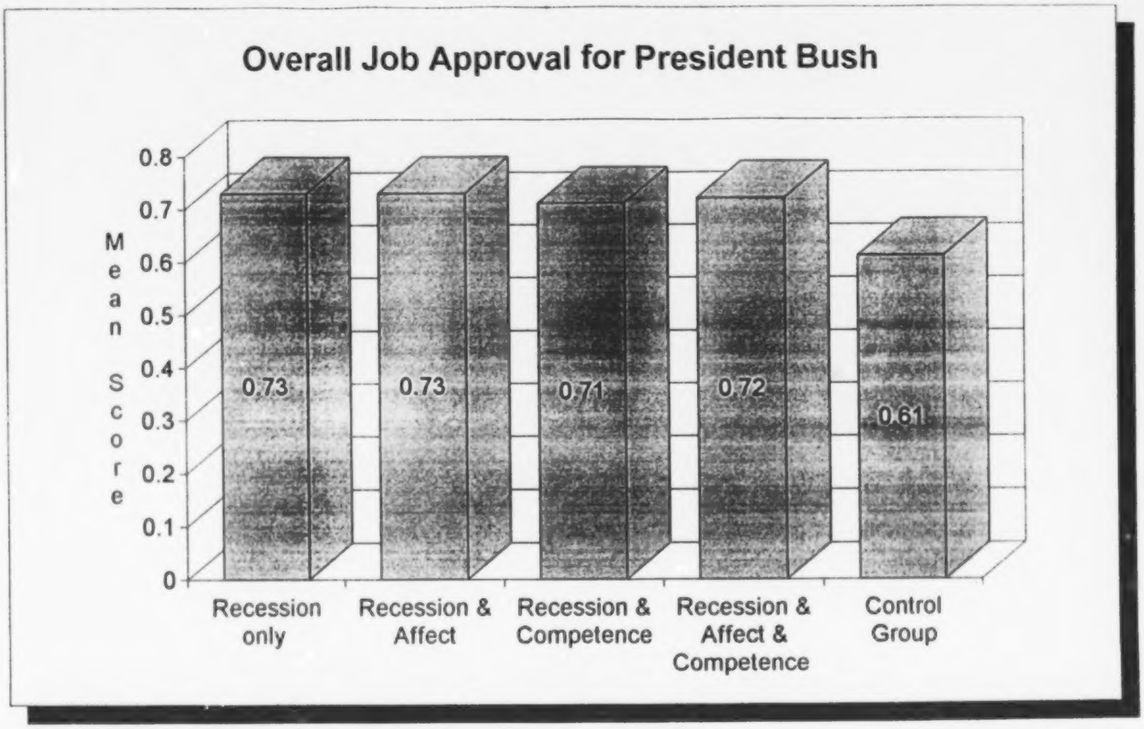

Figure 5: Overall Job Approval for Bush as a Function of Priming.
(scale: 0 = high approval, 1 = low approval)

Table 1: The Impact of Overall Affect, Competence, Leadership, Knowledge, and Recession Salience on Perceptions of President Bush's Overall Job Performance (unstandardized OLS-regression estimates).

Group	Opinion Domain	Non-primed	Primed	Difference	Sign. of Diff.
Group 1: Recession Primed	Over. Affect	$-.30^{*}$	$-.41^{***}$	-.11	.44
	Competence	-.09	.30	.39	.44
	Leadership	$-.94^{***}$	-.23	.71	.25
	Knowledge	$.18^{*}$	.09	-.09	.09
	Recession	-.007	-.04	.033	.36
Group 2: Recession & Affect Primed	Over. Affect	$-.30^{*}$	-.17	.13	.50
	Competence	-.09	.30	.39	.08
	Leadership	$-.94^{***}$	$-.51^{@}$	.43	.43
	Knowledge	$.18^{*}$	.03	-.15	.12
	Recession	-.007	.01	.003	.50
Group 3: Recession & Competence Primed	Over. Affect	$-.30^{*}$	$-.27^{@}$	.03	.33
	Competence	-.09	-.04	.05	.42
	Leadership	$-.94^{***}$	$-.75^{**}$	.19	.25
	Knowledge	$.18^{*}$	-.10	-.28	.01
	Recession	-.007	.01	.017	.49
Group 4: Recession & Affect & Competence Primed	Over. Affect	$-.30^{*}$	-.08	.22	.45
	Competence	-.09	.22	.31	.26
	Leadership	$-.94^{***}$	-.33	.61	.28
	Knowledge	$.18^{*}$	.03	-.15	.11
	Recession	-.007	.01	.017	.29

$^{@}$ $p < .10$ (one-tailed)
* $p < .05$ (one-tailed)
** $p < .01$ (one-tailed)
*** $p < .001$ (one-tailed)

Note: All variables were coded to range from 0 to 1, 1 (or -1 for overall affect).To test the statistical significance of the changes in the coefficients across the primed and no-prime control groups, I estimated an enhanced version of equation 1. In particular, I added the following variables to it: (prime/no-prime), (prime/no-prime)*(affect), (prime/no-prime)*(competence), (prime/no-prime)*(leadership), (prime/no-prime)*(recession salience). Prime/no-prime is a dummy variable coded zero for the no-prime control group and one for each of the primed groups. Thus, the coefficients associated with each of the multiplicative terms tests whether the impact of each aspect of public

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Endnotes

1.Students in Group 1 to 4 also read one of the news stories read by students in the control group.

2.Initially, 240 stories were retrieved from which about 30 were used in the further construction of the experimental stimuli. Combinations of the following keywords were used in the NEXIS search to identify recession stories relating to people's emotions and Bush's leadership ability: "Recession," "Unemployment," "Bush," "Leadership," "Competence," "Anger," "Feelings," "Emotion," "Pain," "Hate," "Fear."

3.Neutral text material was created by selecting various paragraphs from other news stories found on NEXIS, which were then edited so they would not contain direct references to the recession or President Bush.

4.Using this measurement approach has the advantage that it not only asks respondents to consider past feelings, but also provides for multiple measures and thus ensures ample opportunity for item analysis (reliability and validity assessment) and enables scale building and multiple methods of analysis. Marcus, The Structure of Emotional Response, Appendix, 757.

5.A pretest with about 35 undergraduate students was conducted with the same questions two weeks before the actual experiment took place. No major problems were found.

6.According to this "need for orientation" scale (range: 0 to 1), 88 students had a low, 21 a moderate, and 31 students had a high need for political orientation.

7.Age, race and income were assumed to be relatively equal among the tested undergraduates at the Bloomington campus.

8.Because of the small number of subjects in each experimental groups (N = 27), the cut-off point for significant priming effects is set at a $p < .10$ level.

9.T-test analysis shows that all mean-differences between control and the four prime-group are insignificant.

10.The finding that recession-only primed subjects were no better at recalling general background information about Bush than non-primed subjects might be explained by the fact that most students were not able to answer more than three Bush-knowledge questions correctly. Cognitive priming assumes that subjects can only retrieve information that has been previously stored in long-term memory.

11.This, of course, could be a result of the fact that neither of the two affect-prime stories mentioned Bush or related the plight of the unemployed directly to the president.

12.The priming effect as induced by the experiment was tested by estimating the following priming equation: the dependent variable "overall job approval" is predicted by five independent variables that are primed by exposure to news about the recession: the effects of recession salience (β_1), the additional effects of general knowledge about Bush's social background (β_2), perception of his competence (β_3) and presidential leadership (β_4), and ratings of overall affect toward President Bush (β_5). Additionally, effects of party identification ($\beta_{6,7}$: Republican, Democrat), and sex (β_8) are controlled for, while *e* represents the disturbance term.

Gender was coded as a dummy variable, 1 for male, 0 for female. Party identification was represented by two dummy variables: the first was coded 1 for strong and weak Republicans and 0 for all other respondents; the second was coded 1 for strong and weak Democrats and 0 for all other respondents.

To test the basic claim of priming that extensive media coverage of certain issues primes the audience to give more weight to the covered issues when they evaluate the presidents' overall job performance, the priming equation shown above is estimated twice, first based on respondents in the no-prime control group and then on respondents in each of the four primed groups. According to the priming theory, the impact of perceptions related to the prime cues (indexed as β_1 to β_5) on assessments of President Bush's overall job performance should be greater in the primed groups than in the no-primed control group.

13. Similarly to the two previous multiple-regression analyses, effects of need for orientation on media priming were assessed by regressing the five independent variables (recession-salience, Bush-knowledge, competence, presidential leadership, and overall affect) on ratings of Bush's overall job performance, while controlling for party identification and sex. This time, however, cases from all four prime groups were first combined and then subdivided into three levels of need for orientation (low, moderate and high). This was necessary because the prime groups were too small to be subdivided.

14. Surprisingly, for students in the same group, lower evaluations of Bush's competence in handling the economy influenced evaluations of Bush's overall job performance positively ($B = -.40$, $p < .05$); possibly a statistical artifact.

15. Influences of sex were negligible.

16. This effect is independent from possible influences of news stories that mentioned Bush and thus might have been more successful in priming Bush-related evaluations. All regression analyses controlling for the potential effect of mentioning Bush (dummy variable: 1 = Bush mentioned, 0 = Bush not mentioned) showed no significant impact of experimental group affiliation.

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